APRIL 18, 2005

IN THESE TIMES

CHALMERS JOHNSON ON AMERICA'S ALARMING FOREIGN POLICY



HOW TO TURN YOUR RED STATE BLUE

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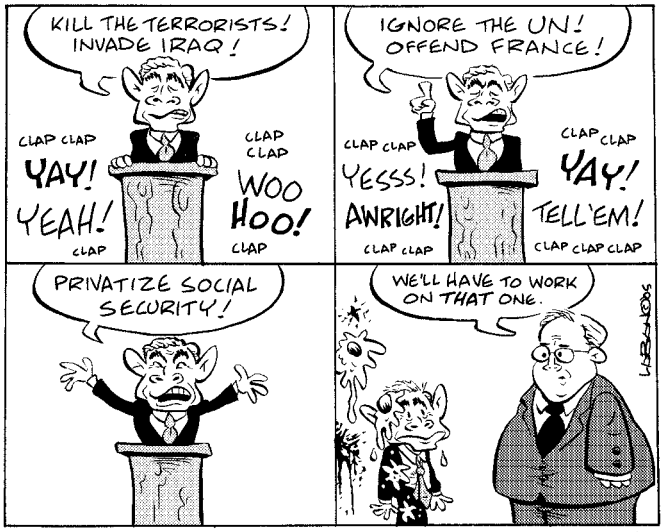
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> There's no such thing as the U.N. If the U.N. Secretariat building lost ten stories, it wouldn't make a bit of difference.
>
> John Bolton, Bush's nominee for ambassador to the United Nations, 1994

TERRY LABAN



Editorial

Face the Facts

By Joel Bleifuss

With the Republicans in control of the executive, legislative and, increasingly, judicial branches of our federal government, it is time for progressives to face up the sad truth that they are losers.

Only when we know where we stand can we begin to make wise choices about where we should be going. In this issue we provide two perspectives on directions progressives should consider taking.

Chalmers Johnson, the author of *Blowback* and, most recently, *The Sorrows of Empire*, lays out what a progressive foreign policy might look like. He writes, "First and foremost, we should get out of Iraq and demand that Congress never again fail to honor article 1, section 8, clause 11 of the Constitution giving it the exclusive power to go to war."

Christopher Hayes challenges the time-honored assumption that a majority of Americans are in their hearts progressive—a political force ready to be activated by the right message. Instead, Hayes asks us to consider how we can win progressive converts. He suggests that creating a national, grassroots debtors movement "should be a top progressive priority." Such a movement, he writes, might have been able to stop "the criminally venal bankruptcy bill just passed by the Senate" by a vote of 74 to 25.

What Johnson's and Hayes' proposals have in common is that their ultimate success requires that the number of progressives grow to the point that we can influence the votes and behavior of members of Congress.

Were those Democrats who supported the bankruptcy bill, which exempts credit card debt from bankruptcy laws, voting on principle? According to the Center for Responsive Politics, since 1999 the Democrats who voted against the bill each have received an average of $20,200 from the credit card industry, as compared to the $51,200, on average, collected by the 18 Democrats who voted to pass it.

Similarly, Senate Democrats had an opportunity to weigh in on the Iraq war when they voted on whether to confirm Condoleezza Rice as secretary of state. They might have been expected to hold Rice accountable for her repeated lies about the dangers posed by Iraq. But only 13 Senate Democrats opposed her nomination.

Confirmation votes on two more Bush nominees, John Negroponte and John Bolton, provide Senate Democrats another opportunity to take a principled stand. Don't hold your breath.

Being political animals, Democrats too often take the most politically expedient path. Barack Obama, for example, in his Senate debut voted to confirm Rice and help Bush pass the pro-corporate "tort reform" bill. That the darling of progressives can vote this way without fear of repercussion says something about progressives' lack of clout and political immaturity. Didn't we learn anything during the Clinton administration, when progressives muted their criticism of bad policies out of deference to their "friends" in power?

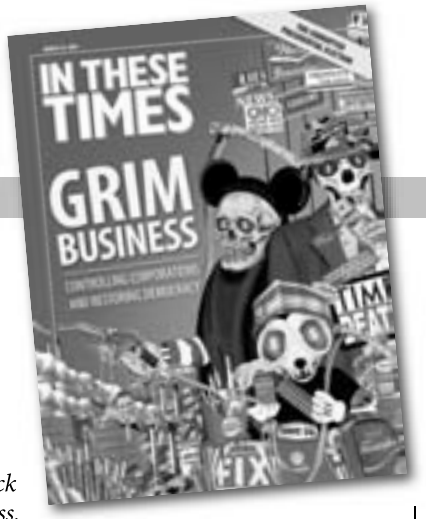
It is not enough to fight one judicial appointment or another legislative travesty. We need to confront Democratic legislators' tendency to take progressive support for granted, at the same time that we challenge the legitimacy of the conservative worldview that sets the national agenda.

Progressives must be proud of their ideals and not shirk the responsibility to defend them. As Garret Keizer writes in the current issue of *Mother Jones*, "Had Howard Dean been an evangelical Christian with an evangelical Christian base, would his followers have deserted him because his Iowa holler made him 'unelectable'? Or would they have closed ranks behind him because his stand on the Iraq war made him right?"

We are right, and though we may not be in the majority, we should be motivated by the conviction that the ideal of "liberty and justice for all" is a basic principle not to be compromised. Relentlessly defending that principle may seem hopeless, but we are not required to win now, only to persevere until winning becomes possible. ■

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Letters



Doomed to Repeat?

Lee Drutman and Charlie Cray are on point in contending that "democracy offers the best solution to challenging corporate power" ("The People's Business," March 14). However, the words "restoring, reestablishing and reclaiming" imply that we once truly enjoyed our promised self-governance.

As a reconstructed U.S. history teacher doing penance, I have learned how the few have always ruled the many in a nation whose leaders purport to spread democracy around the world.

Movements have been struggles for rights, people seeking to drive themselves *into* the Constitution. As Drutman and Cray point out, we need to "stop allowing corporations to claim Bill of Rights protections to undermine citizen-enacted laws"—but it is no simple matter to kick the corporate form out of the Constitution. To do so requires that we know our history, and learn lessons from past people's struggles.

Mary Zepernick
Yarmouth, Mass.

We're Still Waiting

Your article summarizing the statistical case that the 2004 presidential election was stolen presented the strongest argument I have seen for that position ("A Corrupted Election," March 14). I am delighted you did not "get over it" and have continued to scrutinize the validity of Bush's reelection. Nonetheless, I hope you print the most cogent rebuttal you can find.

I suggest this not because I think your position is mistaken. In fact, the evidence I had seen thus far had caused me to be agnostic on the question.

But given the complexity of the issue, and its importance, it would be useful for those of us who wish to reach our own conclusions—I suspect the considerable majority of your readers—to be able to weigh the competing positions side by side.

Randy Baker
Seattle

A Modest Proposal

The Bush administration wants to change Social Security ("Beating the Boomers," March 14). It says it must do this because fewer workers will be paying in to support an ever-increasing aging population that is living longer. If the change is not made now, it claims, in a generation or so, Social Security will go bust.

Not to worry. I have the perfect solution.

When the Bush administration declares its next war, it should create armed services consisting exclusively of draftees ages 65 and older. Men and women. White, black and in-between—no sexism, no racism. Wheelchairs, intravenous tubes, catheters, oxygen tents and all. No excuses and no exceptions—if they're breathing, they're in. These bedpan brigades will truly be the United States' shock and awe battalions.

This will create Homeland Security like we're never had before: a boomerang weapon of mass destruction. If things go right, it will destroy most if not all of the aged who would otherwise be alive, mooching off the young, hard-working, contributing portion of the population. And thus, Social Security will be saved.

What the hell! At age 85 and lame, my life is mainly way behind me. As a patriot and loving grandfather of two boys under 14, this is the least I can do to secure their future. Better me to be sent off to die in another senseless war than they.

God bless America!

Mike Hecht
Highland Park, Ill.

The Gaping Wound

I'd like to respond to Lisa M. McCune, a working-class poor woman who wrote to express her fury at the Democrat's "elitism"—a fury that drove her to vote for Bush ("Letters," February 28). Her letter is insightful and certainly worthy of reflection, but I want to ask her, "How does your vote feel now?" I know many like you, Lisa, who voted for Bush to "prove something" to the Democrats. So, you cut off your nose to spite your face—how does the gaping, festering wound feel now as you watch the true elite jackals rip and tear at every Great Society program?

I suggest Lisa read John Perkins' *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* (see Mark Engler's review, page 27) to truly understand the nexus of status, heritage, power, money and hypocrisy that orchestrates elitism and is designed to protect the wealthy at the expense of the rest of us. John

FIRE ON THE PRAIRIE



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Perkins is the real deal. An elitist spilling his guts, endangering his life, to try and wake us up to what elitism really is, how it works and how expendable we all are to the private corporatocracy.

I always thought voting was not about taking every little thing so personally, but rather looking at how policy will be defined, changed and enacted. Policy, which affects me every damn day of my life as I, a working-class woman, try to survive. Every day of this administration scares me more. I don't need to drink a beer with my president, I need policy that protects me and my loved ones; policy that respects human beings, including the fragile; policy that rewards me for a life hard worked with more than abject terror at being discarded in my old age.

Molly Lockwood
Vista, Calif.

The Indomitable Parry

I am writing to commend the indomitable Robert Parry on his article about the potential implementation of the "Salvador Option" in Iraq ("Bush's Death Squads," February 14). With major players of the "Option" now holding key posts in the Bush administration—Elliot Abrams was appointed deputy national security advisor and John Negroponte was recently chosen for the new post of national intelligence director—it will come as little surprise if death squad operations against insurgents surreptitiously begin to take hold in Iraq. Such methods, with their "ends justify the means" mentality, often produced serial massacres in Central America, as Parry—who can claim first-hand knowledge of the region during the '80s—so aptly and accurately pointed out.

David Kolker
Research Fellow,
Council on Hemispheric Affairs
Washington, D.C.

Memo to the Art Department

I have once before contacted you about your abundant use of pictures of Bush in your stories. In your latest issue (March 14), you again display large pictures of him. Since I always have to cover up his picture whenever I see it in my daily paper, and turn off the radio or TV whenever he is on, I find it even more difficult to have to deal with him in your publication.

I would like to suggest that if you must use a picture to illustrate your story, find one of his victims, or illustrations of programs that he is cutting that are appropriate to the topic. Please try some creativity.

Aliza Keddem
Portland, Ore.

Correction

David Bacon's "The Midwest Union Rollback," (March 14) erroneously claimed that Missouri has a "right to work" law.

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The Fall of the 527

New legislation aims to rein in groups that can collect unregulated donations. *By Tracy Van Slyke*

The rise of 527s was one of the big political stories of 2004. But the influence of these groups could be relegated to a historical footnote if a bipartisan group in Congress can fast-track the next phase in campaign finance reform.

In 2002, Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Russell Feingold (D-Wisc.) wrote and helped pass the 2002 Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) which banned unlimited contributions to political parties and candidates. On February 2, the two senators introduced the 527 Reform Act of 2005, supported by Sen. Trent Lott (R-Miss.), who has previously opposed any reform to the campaign finance system. The proposed legislation requires 527s to register as political committees with the Federal Election Commission (FEC) and subjects their fundraising to current campaign finance laws.

If passed, the bill would affect 527s ranging from the progressive-leaning America Coming Together (ACT) and the Media Fund to the right-wing Swift Boat Veterans for Truth and Progress for America. During 2004, these groups used unregulated contributions to finance political advertisements and voter education efforts, bringing national voter mobilization efforts to a new level. According to the Center for Public Integrity, 527s raised more than $550 million for state, issue and federal elections in 2004. Fifty-three of these 527s focused their activities largely or exclusively on the presidential election and raised $246 million during the 2003-2004 election cycle.

"The legislation is intended to put groups like ACT and Progress for America out of business. But it won't affect the ones that don't play in federal elections," notes Aron Pilhofer, co-author of "The 527 Project," a series of reports issued by the Center for Public Integrity. "But if this bill passes," writes Pilhofer, "it is simply naive to think that all this money is just going to evaporate. Every time legislation is passed to tighten

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campaign finance laws it makes it harder to track this money. The 527 Reform Act is just the latest in this constant muddling of the campaign finance system."

Organizations formed under the 527 section of the tax code are defined as tax-exempt political organizations working to influence elections, but were not limited by the 2002 McCain-Feingold legislation. Since 2000, many 527s worked on local and single issue-based campaigns and were not a factor in national politics. Capitalizing on the opportunity presented by 527s to skirt the 2002 ban on soft money donations in federal elections, Democrats began to gather funds from traditional progressive sources, including labor, women's organizations and environmentalists, along with tens of millions of dollars from a few wealthy individuals. (See "Door by Door" January 5, 2004.) After initial efforts to stop their political counterparts, Republicans jumped on the 527 bandwagon.

The proposed legislation will require that if a 527's sole purpose is to influence a federal election it must be funded with "hard money"—donations subject to the limits and reporting requirements of the BCRA. The bill also caps individual donations to $5,000. If a 527 is working on a combination of local and federal campaigns, at least 50 percent of these expenditures must be financed with hard money, and individual, non-federal "soft money" donations would be capped at $25,000.

"The end of soft money influence with passage of the McCain-Feingold Act made a difference. It meant that federal officeholders weren't in the business of raising this money and eliminated the toxic link between donors and policy-makers," says Celia Wexler, vice president of Common Cause. "In 2004, the 527s may have obeyed all the rules in place about not physically coordinating with the political parties. But basically that was just a wink and a nod."

But stricter rules don't always make an level playing field, says Nick Nyhart, executive director of Public Campaign, a nonprofit group organizing public financing election reform in states across the country.

"No matter how far you draw those regulatory lines, at the end of the day you still have a situation of wealthy candidates or candidates connected to wealth going up against candidates that don't want to play that game," Nyhart says. "No matter where you strike that balance, there is still a political bias toward people with wealth or access to wealth."

Supporters of the 527 Reform Act, including nonprofits such as Common Cause, Public Citizen and the League of Women Voters contend the proposed legislation would force 527s to follow the same rules as other tax-exempt organizations working to influence the outcome of federal elections, including political action committees and candidates' campaigns. Such a reform would limit the influence of millionaires such as Democrat George Soros—who donated almost $22.5 million to ACT, Joint Victory Campaign 2004 (which passed out money to organizations such as ACT and the Media Fund) and MoveOn.org—and Republican Bob J. Perry—who donated more than $8 million to the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth and Progress for America.

"Some people think that the standards of soft money are not just corrupting candidates, but that some people's free speech in politics is more influential multiple times over because they have more money than the average citizen," says Steven Weissman, associate director for The Campaign Finance Institute, a non-partisan nonprofit.

But opponents of the proposed bill contend that instead of limiting average citizens' access, 527s have reconnected them to the political process.

"527s invoked issues that no one wanted to talk about. Without them, you remove the independent voice," says Liz Towne, director for advocacy programs for the nonprofit Alliance for Justice. "Everyone likes to talk about the unsavory things that 527s did during the election, but they also brought a larger number of people to the polls for the first time in decades." Further, 527 supporters argue that they are not subject to regulation by the FEC or fund-raising restrictions if their efforts do not directly coordinate with political parties and their outreach focuses on issues rather than the support of one candidate.

Along with Alliance for Justice, groups such as the League of Conservation Voters, NARAL Pro-Choice America and Sierra Club warn that the bill could be the first step in targeting 501(c) organizations, the tax-exempt nonprofits that many people predict will be the next drop-off point for large political donations.

"Nonprofits must also ask the question, 'Who's next?'" says Alliance for Justice President Nan Aron. "Despite promises from proponents of this legislation, the 501(c) community is an obvious next target." ■

IN SHORT

Don't Ask, and We Won't Tell

It helps to have friends in high places. An investigation conducted by Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) has revealed that Pentagon officials withheld information from international auditors on behalf of Halliburton.

Halliburton subsidiary KBR told Pentagon investigators that it would make numerous redactions of an embarrassing audit that was to be reviewed by the International Advisory and Monitoring Board (IAMB). The IAMB was created by the United Nations to monitor the Development Fund for Iraq (DFI), the successor to the U.N. Oil for Food Program. KBR's redactions violated U.N. Security Council Resolution 1483, which requires all DFI-related funds to be administered "in a transparent manner."

When the Pentagon's Defense Contract Audit Agency (DCAA) conducted audits of Halliburton's no-bid contracts in 2003, it raised concerns about the prices the company charged for its oil-related work in Iraq, including the more than $27 million it billed for transporting $82,000 worth of fuel from Kuwait to Iraq.

On September 28, 2004, Halliburton sent a letter in response to the Army Corps of Engineers describing how "KBR has redacted the information that KBR considers to be a disclosure of its proprietary policies, procedures, and accounting information." The letter added, "We have redacted the statements of DCAA that we believe are factually incorrect or misleading and could be used by a competitor to damage KBR's ability to win and negotiate new work."

Harold C. Relyea of the Congressional Research Service told Waxman's office that overcharge amounts are "hardly proprietary information" and noted that it would be "a terrible abrogation of responsibility" for the government to adopt a company's redactions without making its own assessment of their validity.

In a letter to President Bush, Waxman asked, "What steps you will take to recover the overcharges and put the interests of the U.S. taxpayer and the Iraqi people ahead of the profits of Halliburton?"

—Christopher Burrow

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APPALL-O-METER

5.3 Patriotic Gore

A wave of revulsion passed through the world's op-ed pages last month after a particularly grim bit of amateur war footage was made public that showed U.S. soldiers jokingly posing an Iraqi corpse to wave at the camera. For some time, though, video clips and JPEG files have abounded on Internet sites such as Undermars.com, where snapshots of (mostly Iraqi) carnage appear over jocular captions like "Was this my head?" or "Mmm, I like my drumsticks fried."



According to the *Los Angeles Times*, GIs circulate their videographic oeuvre like teenagers exchange mix CDs. Said one auteur: "I have a lot of pictures of dead Iraqis—everybody does." Said another: "It's like a trophy, something to keep. I was there. I did this." The latter soldier showed his video hits to his family and his fiancée. Disappointingly, they were a bit creeped out. But that's the home front for you. "It gets the point across," the soldier concluded. "This isn't some jolly freakin' peacekeeping mission."

1.9 Bucky's Bonanza

What kind of world would this be if the president of the United States could start a war that enriched dozens of his aides, cronies and political sponsors but forgot to look after his family? A cold one indeed.

So it's nice to know that dear old Uncle Bucky has been remembered. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, William H.T. "Bucky" Bush, a brother of George Bush the Greater, signed on as a director of St. Louis-based defense contractor Engineered Support Systems Inc. (ESSI) some five years ago, just before his nephew George the Lesser assumed the rod of state.

Fortune has smiled on ESSI and Bucky ever since. The company posted record profits in the quarter that ended January 31, thanks in no small part to a little bit of no-bidsky action in Iraq. (Some of ESSI's contracts are now being investigated by the Pentagon's inspector general for improprieties.)

As for his share, Bucky recently cashed in stock options to the tune of half a mill. Quizzed by a reporter about his role in securing preferential contracts, Bucky retorted, "I don't make any calls to the 202 area code." (Christmas cards usually do the trick.)

4.2 Shipping and Handling Not Included

Awarding government contracts to Halliburton is a bit like buying a Persian rug on eBay. You may get a fair price for the thing itself, but you get thoroughly rogered on the shipping and handling. According to a Pentagon audit, Halliburton subsidiary KBR bought $82,100 worth of cooking and heating fuel in Kuwait, then shipped it to U.S. authorities in Iraq—at a cost of $27.5 million. Good luck, bidders.

—Dave Mulcahey

Bolton vs. the United Nations

Bush's mad cop–bad cop ruse. *By Ian Williams*

Senate Foreign Relations Chair Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) scheduled hearings for April 7 on the confirmation of John Bolton as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.

Lugar signaled that he is less than ecstatic over the nomination, telling the *Washington Post* that he was "going to reserve any comments about the appropriateness or not of the president's choice." (In 1999, Lugar showed less restraint, hailing President Clinton's choice, Richard Holbrooke, as "an excellent nominee.") More explicit was Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.), who said, "I do have concerns, because the United Nations is a very important institution. We need to send someone to the U.N. that has the skills to work with the secretary-general." But five days later, after a visit by Bolton, Hagel changed his mind and declared he would support the nomination.

Bolton's appointment clearly makes a mockery of the kiss and make-up European tour of George W. Bush and Condoleezza Rice. Along with Bush's nomination of Paul Wolfowitz to head the World Bank, the president's choice of Bolton reveals the skull beneath the skin of administration foreign policy. Appointing someone who has repeatedly gone on the record saying that the United Nations should not exist—or that, at least, the United States should not be part of it—is hardly a diplomatic response to the crucial discussions currently taking place on reforming the organization.

Bolton has publicly dismissed international law and treaties, since they may inhibit American freedom of action. In 1997, he wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*, "Treaties are 'law' only for U.S. domestic purposes. In their international operations, treaties are simply 'political' obligations."

Five years ago, he accused U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan of a power grab; now he's supposed to work with him on U.N. reform, and seek cooperation from him for help in extracting the United States from Iraq. Bolton's other hobby horses include opposition to the International Criminal Court ("a product of fuzzy-minded romanticism [that] is not just naive, but dangerous"), and the conventions on landmines, small arms trade and child soldiers. He also opposes the nuclear test ban treaty—except when it applies to Koreans, Iranians and the like.

With the appointment of Bolton, the rest of the world will now see American foreign policy as it really is, without the smooth interface of Colin Powell, who so often performed on the world stage as a good cop in a bad cop administration.

In addition to dealing with the dubiously multilateral position of the Rice State Department, and coping with the neocon imperialist fantasies of Wolfowitz at the World Bank, foreign diplomats will be faced with the noisily unilateral Bolton.

Despite having spent time at neoconservative think tanks and groups like the American

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Bolton: A bad choice.

YOSHIKAZU TSUNO / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Enterprise Institute and the Project for a New American Century, there is nothing neo about Bolton's conservatism. As befits a former U.N.-basher for the Heritage Foundation, Bolton's roots are in an old, nativist and deeply reactionary tradition, as suggested by his closeness to his longtime patron, former Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.). Woolly neoliberal idealism about exporting democracy isn't his style, as he demonstrated when as part of the Bush legal team he strode into a library in Florida in 2000 and announced, "I'm here to stop the vote."

Fringe groups have long seen the United Nations as an instrument of a foreign conspiracy to take over the United States. Their strident views have, like so many conservative inanities, now become mainstream. Bolton's nomination is just the culmination of this process. "Move America Forward," which describes itself as "the organization leading the effort to evict the United Nations from American soil and halt American funding of the U.N.," has announced it will lobby the Senate and "rally public support for John Bolton's nomination."

Bolton wants the United States on top, and any potential threats to that supremacy removed. Which is why one item high on his personal agenda will be to get the very United Nations that he does not believe in to enforce the non-proliferation treaty (which he does not believe in either) in Iran—which he does sincerely believe to be a pivot of the Axis of Evil.

The only effective counter to this agenda will be senators brave enough to stand up and say that this country and the world are better served by a functioning United Nations, which does indeed have a primary role in avoiding world conflicts.

In the preamble to the Declaration of Independence, its drafters cited "a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind," to explain what they were doing. The nomination hearing allows the Democrats and the sane Republicans to show a similar respect, not just to the opinions of mankind, but to the majority of American men and women who have profound reservations about John Bolton. ■

IAN WILLIAMS, *the U.N. correspondent for* The Nation, *writes frequently for* In These Times.

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Amy Richards

An Activism of One's Own

By Jessica Clark

FRESH FROM PARTICIPATING in a panel discussion at a Chicago screening of *Chisolm '72: Unbought and Unbossed*, feminist writer and organizer Amy Richards describes how she and co-author Jennifer Baumgardner arrived at the idea for their latest book.

Too often, Richards explains, progressive speakers passionately outline a problem, only to resort to the "generic three" answers when asked what comes next: Call your politician, donate money and volunteer. *Grassroots: A Field Guide for Feminist Activism*, published in January, is the result of years of fielding such questions from frustrated audience members.

"The political left is at a stalled moment," Richards says, "not because there is a lack of passion and not because there is a lack of issues, but because there is a lack of ideas."

The answer, Richards and Baumgardner suggest, is more localized activism, tailored to each person's circumstances and resources. "We believe that activism is by definition profound, a big deal, revolutionary," the duo writes. "However, we are challenging the notion that there is one type of person who is an activist—someone serious, rebellious, privileged and unrealistically heroic."

The tone and structure of *Grassroots* reveal the ethos of Richards' life: that politics should emerge from and be embedded in one's everyday experiences. Drawing from the authors' own trajectories—from young Third Wave feminist pioneers to thirty-something mothers and professionals—*Grassroots* tells its story in chapters that organize activism along the life course. The narrative is peppered with anecdotes from activists who wrote in to Richards' online feminist advice column, "Ask Amy," and describes the authors' personal experiences, from meeting at *Ms.*, to writing their last book, *Manifesta*, to co-founding Soapbox, a lecture agency for "speakers who speak out."

The result is a bit like the conversation with Richards herself: warm, engaging and—studded as it is with personal asides about famous feminists, East Coast colleges and friends with nannies—more than a bit redolent of privilege. As white, educated and well-connected activists, Richards and Baumgardner have been dogged by accusations of elitism ever since *Manifesta* was published in 2000.

Richards, whose upbringing included both stints on welfare and in private schools, candidly addresses this issue in *Grassroots:* "As soon as someone is successful, he or she is often accused of being too privileged to be radical. I don't fall prey to that critique anymore because I know from my own experience that I am using what privilege I have to expand resources to others."

But questions of class popped up again last July, when Richards wrote a controversial article for the *New York Times Magazine* detailing her decision to undergo "selective reduction," a procedure that reduces the number of fetuses that a pregnant woman is carrying—in Richards' case, from triplets to one child. The procedure has become more common as women on fertility drugs experience potentially dangerous multiple conceptions. But Richards' reasons for her decision, based in part on fears of threatening her career and having to "start shopping only at Costco and buying big jars of mayonnaise," struck a nerve.

Anti-abortion activists demanded that the *New York Times* issue a correction disclosing Richards' identity as a feminist and abortion-rights advocate, and argued that the term "selective reduction" masked her choice to abort in order to support her own lifestyle. Even pro-choice advocates found Richards' ethical reasoning difficult to navigate. A blogger at Feministing.com wrote: "I wondered how Richards could 'get rid of two of' her pregnancies, just because she didn't 'want to' have them. And then it dawned on me. That's the entire point! What's right for another woman may not be right for me. And that's why reproductive freedom and choice are so crucial."

"From the left's perspective, I wasn't sympathetic enough," says Richards. "I should have played up the fact that I was really poor, or it was medically dangerous. … This comes from the same movement that always argues, 'It's not just poor black women that have abortions!' "

Navigating this storm, along with the challenges of raising her son, have prompted Richards' next book, currently titled *Opting In: The Case for Motherhood and Feminism*. Writing in reaction to another high-profile *New York Times Magazine* article, Lisa Belkin's "The Opt Out Revolution," Richards will explore contradictions between feminist rhetoric on mothering and activist reality.

Richards' confessional brand of activism isn't for everyone, but her life remains admirably consistent with her rhetoric. As the prologue of *Grassroots* encouragingly concludes, "The real portrait of an activist, after all, is just a mirror." ■

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Viewpoint *By Susan Davis*

The Dead Hand of Disney

The "Disney Hand" is devoted to extending Disney into every crevice of life, branding the company by creating emotional relationships with consumers.

SUSAN DAVIS
teaches Communication at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. She is the author of Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience *(California).*

It's a strange thing when a letter from the school principal arrives on lime green and aqua stationery. Stranger still when the postmark is Burbank, California, and the return address reads "Imagineer That!" But it was real. The communique trumpeted "Disney Channel is coming to our school to help spark our creativity"—in a pre-packaged 90-minute assembly.

"Imagineer That! The Creativity Adventure" is designed to "help empower students to unleash their creative powers." It folds "an imagination skills building workshop" and a sighting of Disney Channel star Ricky Ullman into the middle-school day, and follows up with a celebratory evening "wrap party." Full participation is guaranteed by a chance to win a family vacation to (where else?) Walt Disney World. The principal described this hoopla as "a fantastic opportunity."

The "Disney Hand," as the corporate office that provided this opportunity is called, is devoted to extending Disney into every crevice of life, branding the company by creating emotional relationships with consumers. And our floundering, underfunded, overstressed public schools and their captive audiences provide the perfect gateway.

Historically, public schools have been our major entryway to citizenship and participation in society. They are where generations of immigrants became Americans, learned some notion of what we think is civic duty, and were prepared to enter the blue and white collar workforce. American public schools provided astonishingly good educations for free to hundreds of millions of people until, sometime in my lifetime, the upper tenth of taxpayers decided other people's kids were expendable.

During the last two decades, most of the public schools my kids attended have endured unbelievable budgetary slashings and burnings. Now they're faced with the draconian and punitive No Child Left Behind Act, which sets testing standards that are impossible to meet and then punishes schools for not meeting them. Low test scores in turn lead to more funding cuts, and libraries, music programs, phys ed and art become unimaginable luxuries. Not coincidentally, since 1997 there's been what economist Juliet Schor calls "an explosive rise in nearly all types of school-based marketing" by media, food and consumer-product corporations. Schools' current fragility makes them an even more "fantastic opportunity" today.

Into this grim scenario parachute the Imagineers, with their perky boowah about creativity.

My son, having grown up in a household of confirmed and unrepentant Disno-phobes, opted out with no prodding and spent assembly period in study hall. When it was over, I asked a few of his classmates what they'd seen and done. Thomas, 12, said the Imagineers had them "jump around and make noises like monkeys. They told us our teachers are Imagineers." "Not much," said young Tye, "but Ricky Ullman looks older than I thought." In short, a forgettable affair, one more piece of the random flow of stuff directed downwards by the adults of the world, to be suspiciously evaluated and dismissed.

And what did the school get from this? Surely not a gift of 1,000 bucks to put towards pencils, glue and Kleenex—nor toward a new roof. Nope, it got a live appearance by a kid who's been on TV and some good PR in the local newspaper at a time when the school is at risk for not meeting its Annual Progress under No Child Left Behind for the second year in a row.

And what did Disney get? A little piece of positive association; another school they can mention in their "Imagineer That!" ads and put on their list of charity cases. It's small, but it accumulates, branding the company bit by positive bit as educational, oriented to community and the arts. This is not unimportant at a time when Disney is being roiled by scandals and takeover attempts.

What bothers me the most about Imagineers' visit is the idea, endlessly repeated, that the Disney Company knows what imagination is and has a lock on the formula. Through its branding, the company has done a pretty good job of convincing Americans that Mickey Mouse stands for the unfettered mind.

Defining creativity and imagination is not easy. Philosophers, historians and psychologists have spent hundreds of lifetimes trying to explain what imagination and creativity are, but only a few things can be said for certain about it. You can't teach somebody how to have it in an hour and a half, and you can't test for it. You can only support the conditions that help creativity happen.

Then there's that stamp on everything Disney: the Mickey Mouse hand. Distorted and disembodied, it suggests that creativity can be condensed into what is, in fact, a product. Our human hands are a beautiful, flexible interface between our bodies and minds and the rest of the world. For millennia, the open five-fingered hand has signified power, making, blessing and love. Now we're supposed to think our hands inferior to the puffy white glove? It's beyond insulting. ■

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By Rev. Jesse L. Jackson Sr. **Viewpoint**

Ensuring Voting Rights

As our nation has witnessed in the democracy debacle of the last two American presidential elections—in which the loser won and the winner lost—the right to vote preserves all other rights.

Officials elected by the citizens or ones appointed by elected officials set public policy in all spheres of American life. Accordingly, how election rules are set, who is permitted to cast votes, and by what means votes are counted determine public policy—domestically and internationally.

On March 6, Americans observed the 40-year anniversary of the historic "Bloody Sunday" march, which resulted in the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This act implemented non-discriminatory voting rights provisions for people of color, particularly in Southern states where race-conscious election practices were rampant. Because celebration without substance is superstition, we must call on the government to reauthorize the 1965 Voting Rights Act and fill the gaping hole in our democracy by enacting a constitutional amendment for the individual and federally protected right to vote for all citizens.

Rainbow/PUSH Coalition is working with a coalition of civil, labor and women's rights organizations, along with church denominations, to launch a national campaign to secure 1 million signatures in support of this reauthorization, including enforcement provisions such as Section 203 (which provides language and other assistance) and Section 5 (pre-clearance of state voting plans by the U.S. Department of Justice). The deadline for collecting signatures will be August 6, 2005, the 40th anniversary of President Lyndon Johnson's signing of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, after which this petition would be delivered to the White House and Congress.

In conjunction, Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-Ill.) and a host of voting rights organizations are leading the Amendment Project, which aims to secure a constitutional amendment that protects all Americans' individual right to vote. Most Americans believe that the "legal right to vote" in our democracy is explicitly stated in the U.S. Constitution and national law. However, the Constitution only explicitly provides for non-discrimination in voting on the basis of race, sex and age in the 15th, 19th and 26th Amendments, respectively.

Even though the "vote of the people" is perceived as supreme in our democracy (after all, voting rights protect all other rights), as Justice Scalia in *Bush v. Gore* constantly reminded Al Gore's lawyers, the Constitution contains no explicit or fundamental right to suffrage. The Supreme Court majority concluded: "The individual citizen has no federal constitutional right to vote for electors for the President of the United States."

Voting in the United States is instead based on the constitutional principle of "states' rights." The 10th Amendment to the Constitution states: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people." Since the word "vote" appears in the Constitution only with respect to non-discrimination, the so-called "right to vote" is a "state right."

Under our current states' rights voting system, there are approximately 13,000 separately administered voting jurisdictions in the United States, which are structured to be separate and unequal. According to a study by the Caltech and MIT Voting Rights Project, somewhere between 4 and 6 million votes were not counted in 2000 because many states had voting rights irregularities similar to what occurred in Florida.

Without the constitutional right to vote, Congress is only able to pass legislation regulating voting. While Rep. Jackson's proposal supports progressive electoral reform legislation, it leaves the "states' rights" system in place. Currently, Congress mostly uses financial and other incentives to entice the states to cooperate and comply with the law. That's one reason there have been so many problems with the recently passed Help America Vote Act and why many states still have not fully complied with the law.

To fulfill the democratic ideal, we need a constitutional amendment that affirms voting rights. According to Alexander Keyssar, a constitutional law professor at Harvard, 108 of the 119 nations in the world that elect their representatives to all levels of government in some democratic fashion explicitly guarantee their citizens the right to vote in their constitutions. Both Afghanistan's constitution and Iraq's interim legal document contain an explicit right to vote.

The United States is one of the 11 democratic nations in the world whose constitution provides no such thing. Such a gaping hole in American democracy affects other critical issues, such as public education, the right of American workers to organize, a living wage and universal healthcare for all Americans, regardless of resources.

Only through a coalition of conscience, which includes a progressive media unfettered by corporate coffers, can the critical issues of our time come to resolution for the benefit of "We, the People."

Keep Hope Alive! ■

Because celebration without substance is superstition, we must call on the government to reauthorize the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

REV. JESSE L. JACKSON SR. *is the founder and president of the Chicago-based Rainbow/PUSH Coalition.*

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Which Comes First: Growth or Clout?

Unions debate strategy at the spring AFL-CIO Executive Council meeting

BY DAVID MOBERG



What's more important right now for the embattled labor movement, politics or organizing?

At the spring meeting of the AFL-CIO executive council in Las Vegas, debate over this long-standing strategic conundrum took center stage, where it will remain until the federation's potentially tumultuous July convention. But posing the question this way oversimplifies undercurrents of the conflict that are rooted in personalities, institutional power and unions' different experiences in different industries.

The current internal debate was triggered last November by Service Employees International Union (SEIU) President Andy Stern. At its heart, Stern's 10-point plan aims to spark an organizing renewal by dramatically restructuring the labor movement into fewer, bigger unions based on core industries or occupations. The Laborers, UFCW (food and commercial workers), Teamsters, and UNITE HERE (a merger of apparel and hotel unions) allied with SEIU. Most other unions—despite often starkly different strategies—have united behind AFL-CIO President John Sweeney (or sometimes, more precisely, against the provocative Stern).

Sweeney has responded with his own plan that partly addresses Stern's challenges—and has been derided as "Stern lite"—but puts more emphasis on politics. Sweeney came out on top at Las Vegas, when the Executive Committee—an advisory group of top labor leaders without formal power—voted 15 to 7 to reject a Teamsters' proposal that would have rebated half of AFL-CIO dues payments back to affiliated unions that spend 10 percent of their budgets, and at least $2 million a year, on organizing. The committee endorsed Sweeney's proposal to allocate half of the dues paid to the AFL-CIO for political work. The unions favoring the Teamster proposal, and who claim to represent 40 percent of federation members, vowed to fight on.

Labor leaders agree, at least rhetorically, that the AFL-CIO should focus equally on politics and organizing, priorities that John Wilhelm, then president of HERE and now a potential challenger to Sweeney, forcefully promoted five years ago. But within the AFL-CIO there are clear differences of emphasis. For example, some manufacturing unions feel that global pressures overwhelm them. "We have lost 3 million industrial jobs in the last four years," said Steelworkers President Leo Girard. Without new public policies, he said, "we can't put enough money into organizing at that rate to organize 3 million workers."

Ironically, Sweeney came to power 10 years ago arguing that it was possible to organize without waiting for policy changes. But despite increased efforts by the AFL-CIO and a growing number of unions, the union share of the workforce has continued to decline. Now, with a shift in emphasis, Sweeney argues, "we can't wait until we organize millions of workers to have a stronger political program.

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AFSCME, which represents state, county, and municipal employees, agrees, arguing that neutralizing employer opposition is one of the few proven strategies for organizing success. Unions can use state and local legislation as bargaining and comprehensive pressure campaigns to reduce employer opposition.

Incentives for growth

In response, the unions backing the Teamster proposal argued in a joint statement that "a massive shift in resources and focus to organizing and growth in our unions' core industries and sectors is the only path to rebuilding worker power both in the workplace and in the political process."

They advocate restructuring unions through mergers in order to facilitate larger-scale organizing within particular sectors. While there is little support for Stern's original proposal to give the AFL-CIO the power to require mergers, the rebate proposal is designed to financially pressure smaller unions to merge. The proposal also aims to radically shake up the AFL-CIO by cutting its budget and creating a movement to challenge Sweeney's leadership.

Like Sweeney, the challengers also think the AFL-CIO must be active politically, but rather than proposing an increased budget, they advocate a change in strategy. Wilhelm, for example, argues that labor must be more independent of the Democratic Party, both supporting friendly Republicans and mounting primary challenges to unreliable Democrats. Both challengers like Stern and Sweeney and supporters such as Firefighters President Harold Schaitberger have also argued that labor must build ties to Republicans in an era of Republican dominance.

Occasionally, Republicans do strike deals favoring unions. For example, California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and New York Gov. George Pataki both set favorable conditions for UNITE/HERE organizing Indian casinos. But as a matter of strategy, supporting Republicans who are otherwise hostile to labor is very different from working with other progressives to support pro-labor, progressive challengers to wayward Democrats in party primaries.

Though each side insists its proposal is about a vision for the labor movement, much of the debate has focused on budget priorities. Sweeney proposes increasing AFL-CIO political spending by about 30 percent and providing little or no increase to organizing. Instead, Sweeney would replace the current organizing support fund with $15 million in rebates of AFL-CIO dues to a few unions that meet higher standards than the Teamster plan—spending 30 percent (rather than 10 percent) of their national budgets and providing proof of strategic, well-staffed organizing projects.

There are problems with both rebate plans. They provide a relatively small amount of money, as most individual unions already fall far short of the agreed goal of devoting 30 percent of national budgets to organizing. The Teamsters' more generous plan would reallocate less than one percent of the labor movement's total resources to organizing and probably do little to leverage more spending from unions. But it's also not clear whether the higher standards and smaller rebate fund in the Sweeney plan encourage more spending or simply reward unions already most committed to organizing.

Supporting Republicans who are not entirely hostile to labor is very different from working with other progressives to support pro-labor, progressive challengers to wayward Democrats in party primaries.

Fighting for members

Beyond the budget battle, the two sides take different approaches on how to encourage unions to focus on their core constituencies, how to reduce unproductive competition and how to stop unions from undercutting contract standards. The current competition between SEIU and AFSCME to organize 49,000 home-based childcare workers in Illinois illustrates how thorny this issue can be. At the Executive Council meeting in Las Vegas, Stern openly criticized AFSCME President Gerald McEntee for attempting to organize these workers, whom SEIU began organizing 10 years ago.

Defending his union's involvement, McEntee says that AFSCME is a leader in organizing childcare workers nationally and considers them a core industry. AFSCME says it found an interest in unionization among Illinois workers when it began approaching them last fall as part of its election-year political strategy. Moreover, Illinois AFSCME charges that SEIU locals had previously undercut standards for public employees in the contracts it negotiated, including one covering home healthcare workers. AFSCME contends that a troublesome precedent was set when the governor's executive order granting bargaining rights excluded home healthcare workers from the health and pension plans that cover other state workers.

SEIU, which represents home healthcare workers in Illinois and other states, argues that it pioneered the organization of such low-wage contingent workers, won executive orders granting bargaining rights and has over many years significantly improved both working conditions and pay for home healthcare workers.

Although SEIU was previously able to use the AFL-CIO jurisdictional dispute mechanism to prohibit AFSCME from competing to organize home healthcare workers, it has not used the same procedure in this case. "Now the focus is on the 42-day process" of the mail-in ballot election, SEIU Communications Director Ben Boyd says. "It's a Democratic process that will allow 29,000 workers to be heard and hopefully come into this movement." Both unions are on the ballot, each having around 10,000 signed membership cards certified by the independent election officials.

The two unions also have had a troubled—sometimes cooperative, sometimes conflictual—relationship in several other states on organizing both home childcare and healthcare workers. Although both sides in the dispute over the structure and strategy for the AFL-CIO agree that resolving such conflicts is important for the labor movement, ultimately neither mergers into bigger unions nor improved arbitration methods are any substitute for the individual unions reaching agreement on common strategy.

Union leaders at the executive council meeting did find common ground around dramatic proposals to strengthen state labor federations and central labor councils. And other unifying ideas were floated, such as sharing union members who volunteer as part-time or temporary organizers among different unions within the same geographic area.

Yet, as many unionists sadly anticipate and fear a potential departure of SEIU from the AFL-CIO at the national convention this summer, or some other wrenching fracture, labor seems far from forging the common strategy it desperately needs. ■

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HOW TO TURN YOUR RED STATE

BY CHRISTOPHER HAYES





Last fall, I spent seven weeks in the suburbs of Madison, Wisconsin, canvassing undecided voters for John Kerry. Driving back one day from a long session pounding the pavement, our car passed two young Mormon missionaries on bicycles. They were dressed in their standard garb: grim but oddly stylish black suits, white shirts, skinny ties and backpacks, all of which were getting soaked in the rain as they struggled up a hill, standing on their pedals for extra leverage.

"Now that," said a fellow organizer sitting in the backseat, "is canvassing."

Going door to door was hard enough. My pulse would quicken at each door, and after three hours tromping through numbing subdivisions I invariably got the urge to fill in numbers on my walk sheet, grab a soda and wait for the carpool to pick me up. And all we wanted was three minutes of someone's time to ask a few questions, give a short pitch and hand out some literature. A missionary who approaches a stranger's door is seeking nothing less than a complete reconstitution of that person's worldview. One imagines a lot of door slamming, unpleasant words and icy stares.

And yet the improbable fact about missionary activity *is that it works*, regardless of the faith's specific dogma. Mormons are the fastest-growing church in the country.

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E BLUE



Evangelical protestant congregations make up 58 percent of all new churches in the United States. Globally, Islam continues to reach into new and unfamiliar lands, experiencing explosive growth in China. Religions that actively proselytize—Pentecostals, Mormons, Muslims—grow, almost without exception.

There's a corollary to this in politics. Yale political scientists Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber have found in numerous studies of voter contact that face-to-face canvassing is far and away the most effective means of persuasion: Roughly one out of every 15 voters approached at the door will add their vote to your tally.

In a speech accepting his new position as chair of the Democratic National Committee, Howard Dean stressed the importance of reaching out to unbelievers through retail politics. "People will vote for Democratic candidates in Texas, and Utah, and West Virginia," he said, "if we knock on their door, introduce ourselves and tell them what we believe."

Five months after the election, progressives' efforts have largely shifted away from people's doorsteps, toward saving Social Security, opposing reactionary judicial appointees and reining in the administration's foreign policy. But I can't stop thinking about those Mormons on their bicycles. What are progressives doing to win conversions to our faith? Where are our young people on bikes approaching unfamiliar doors? How are we preaching the good news?

The true political nature of Americans

In all the ink spilled post-November about "What We Need To Do Now," precious few answers to this question have been put forth. Commentators seem to think either (a) we don't need to convert people because they already have fundamentally progressive values, or (b) converting voters is impossible, so the Democratic Party should just become more conservative. Both views are misleading and counterproductive; they divert attention from the crucial work of expanding the reach of progressivism.

Joe Conason, in his book *Big Lies: The Right-Wing Propaganda Machine and How It Distorts the Truth* (published before the election), offers a succinct articulation of the first theory: "Whether they now describe themselves as liberal or not, most Americans remain strongly progressive in their views about taxation, health care, education spending, Social Security, environmental protection and corporate regulation."

There are heaps of polls supporting this claim, but before concluding that the Democratic Party's recent misfortunes are the result of mass confusion or false consciousness, these polls must be considered alongside other evidence that suggests something deeper is at work.

Over the past several decades, the Democratic Party's traditional advantage in party identification has evaporated. Equal numbers of voters now consider themselves Democrats and Republicans. In 1977, upward of 45 percent of the population identified themselves as Democrats. Even more dramatic are the percentages of "liberals" and "conservatives" in the electorate. In exit polls from 2004, 34 percent of voters identified as conservative while only 21 percent identified as liberal.

Then there's the fact that both the government's policies and the electorate's voting behavior have shifted dramatically to the right in the last 30 years. Common sense would suggest that the best explanation for this is that most voters are conservative and the Republicans are the conservative party. If this is true, we cannot continue to imagine there exists a slumbering progressive majority waiting to be awakened with the right trumpet call. We cannot cling to the fiction that conservatives have somehow hypnotized the electorate, hoodwinking them into voting for Republicans and reactionaries while leaving untouched their internal worldviews, which somehow remain fundamentally progressive. It is important that we stare directly into the sun on this point. The right has fundamentally reconstituted the way Americans view government, politics, policy and the public sphere. We need to change it back.

In contrast to Conason, and others who have faith in the innate progressivism of the American voters, are Beltway strategists who take the polity's rightward turn as a given and subscribe to thesis (b), that conversion is impossible. Democrats can revive their party, they argue, only by changing their positions so that they more closely represent the conservative electorate.

Members of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) and its founder Al From adhere to this line of thinking. Within the DLC are two groups: One says Democrats need to win back white working class voters by moderating on social issues (abortion, gay marriage, etc.), while another seeks to poach socially moderate, suburban, Christine Todd Whitman-like Republicans by promulgating an even more slavishly probusiness, free market platform.

Such repositioning can easily be self-defeating. In politics it's often more important *that* you stand for something rather than *what* you stand for. Like clockwork, every two years the DLC urges the Democrats to "move to the middle" during campaigns. Then, when candidates take their advice and the inevitable failure ensues, Al From & Co. chide the party for not having gone far enough. The most common complaint I heard while canvassing in Wisconsin was that voters didn't know what Kerry stood for. And a recent Democracy Corps poll reported that twice as many people thought that the Republican Party knows what it stands for. Diluting what little there is left of

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the Democratic brand seems a poor marketing idea.

In other words, when someone proves initially unreceptive to an evangelizer's pitch, the young missionary doesn't then say, "Well, would you be interested in converting if you *didn't* have to believe in Jesus?"

Good cop, better cop

There's a deeper philosophical question, though: What profit a party if it gain a majority and lose its soul? Even if it were true that a kind of neo-Clintonian Democratic majority is the best that can be achieved in the short term, the ultimate goal for progressives is the implementation of policies that promote social and economic justice, a more robust safety net, greater opportunity for all and the democratization of corporate power. Which is to say, electoral victories are means to ends.

Too often, we view the goals of winning elections and implementing a progressive agenda as inherently contradictory, when they can actually be parallel and mutually reinforcing. Creating more self-identified progressives accomplishes both: It creates more Democratic voters and builds a constituency for progressive policies.

Currently, a dysfunctional division of labor exists between Democratic politicians and the progressive base, in which the base spends much of its energy attempting to stop Democratic politicians from selling out core progressive principles, while it is left to the politicians to reach out to those in the mushy middle.

Ideally progressives should be giving candidates cover to implement a progressive agenda by doing the reaching out and convincing themselves. Kerry and Bush won liberals and conservatives by equal margins, respectively, but with conservatives outnumbering liberals five to three, Kerry's nine-point margin among moderates wasn't enough for victory. "Given the big conservative edge over liberals, that was the election," observed E. J. Dionne in the *Washington Post*. "Unless liberalism can refurbish itself, it will continue to be a drag on Democratic opportunities."

If a political party's job is to win elections by doing what is politically expedient, the activist's job is to make doing the right thing politically expedient. The GOP base hollers and screams about judicial nominations, while senators like Arlen Specter and Orrin Hatch present themselves as voices of moderation, but the overall outcome has been a significant and scary rightward lurch in the federal judiciary. I've interviewed right-wing activists who rail against the GOP for selling them out on judicial nominees, but at some level they know they're winning, slowly but surely.

Over the years, progressives have used this bad cop-good cop dynamic to great effect: The tension between labor led by John Lewis (bad cop) and Franklin Roosevelt (good cop) produced the National Labor Relations Act. Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement (bad cop) and LBJ (good cop) brought about the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act.

The lesson is that political parties are empty vessels. A party without a sufficiently militant base will end up standing for very little, and voters would rather vote for something than for nothing. At the same time, however, a party too tightly controlled by its base will likely pull the party toward electoral failure. Only by the productive interchange between activists and the party hierarchy can electoral success and long-term implementation of an ideological vision both be achieved. The challenge is to reach out without selling out. Today, the Democratic Party is failing to do the former while succeeding in the latter. It's the worst of both worlds.

Rick Perlstein, in his marvelous *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus,* writes of a young, ambitious Brent Bozell, today a prominent conservative activist, surveying the prospects for conservatism in 1959. As opposed to fellow Republicans, "who simply assumed a bedrock majority of Americans thought just like them," Bozell argued there was no conservative majority in America. "A conservative electorate," he wrote after Democratic victories in the 1958 mid-term elections, "has to be created."

Since Bozell wrote those words, he and his allies have succeeded in building that electorate largely by making more people into conservatives. The operative question for building a long-term progressive majority is not how we stitch together 51 percent of the voters into the Democratic quilt, nor how we wake people up to their own elusive progressivism. It is how we make more progressives.

Points of access

Getting my hair cut the other day, my hairdresser, a gay man in his 40s who just went back to school to become a social worker, told me about his family's politics. "I can't even discuss politics with my siblings," he said. "My sister is a born-again Christian and my brother is the second best Army recruiter in the nation." He paused for effect. "And they say *my* lifestyle recruits."

That accusation is one of the loopier bits of right-wing slander, but it's part of a larger narrative that claims the entire left is scheming non-stop to seduce and indoctrinate the unsuspecting. This is a comical bit of projection because it is the right that has so effectively created institutions to preach conservatism and win converts.

Examples of right-wing outreach abound, not the least of which are the numerous evangelical churches that became functionally indistinguishable from the Republican Party during the last election. Right-wing talk and Christian radio dominate the airwaves. The "pro-life" movement has created organizations like Feminists for Life and blackgenocide.org that seek to draw in those who don't initially self-identify as conservatives. Under Karl Rove's guidance, the GOP has aggressively courted Latinos through business and professional associations and African Americans through black churches. Conservative think tanks have funded right-wing undergraduate publications and groups that bring conservative stars to campus. The Federalist Society—a club of right-wing lawyers, many of whom played key roles in the Clinton impeachment and now populate the federal judiciary—distributes literature and hosts events attended by almost every first-year law student in the country, many of whom don't realize the group, with its innocuous-sounding name, is essentially a training program for conservative movement lawyers.

As the right has actively pursued a program of evangelization, it has simultaneously sought to infiltrate, discredit or destroy any institution that exposes people to progressive thought.

Consider a baby born in 2005 to a conservative family anywhere in America—that is anywhere outside of a major city where the very particles in the air are liberal. How might this child become a progressive? Her first possible exposure to a progressive worldview would be through children's media: books, videos and television shows. Conservatives patrol this border vigorously. Every several months or so, it seems James Dobson or Jerry Falwell is in high dudgeon railing against the perversions of some innocuous children's television character, from Bert and Ernie to SpongeBob SquarePants. Most recently, conservatives targeted Buster the cartoon rabbit, whose visit in one episode of his PBS show to a lesbian couple in Vermont prompted an

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angry rebuke from Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings.

Next, the child will likely attend public school, an institution conservatives have sought to control by taking over local school boards in order to introduce creationist textbooks, establish abstinence-only sex education and excise any lesson plans tolerant of homosexuality. And while activists seek to influence local curricula, right-wing think tanks advocate fully dismantling public education through vouchers and other ruses.

If our hypothetical student goes to college she will finally, for the first time, come face to face with a progressive worldview. Higher education stands as the only institution in American life today with a significant progressive presence. In classes, in clubs and in dorms, students are exposed to progressives and their views. Not surprisingly, Kerry won college-educated women by nine points, and all voters with post-graduate degrees by 11 points. And while he lost college-educated men, the trend lines are promising. He managed to do four points better than Gore.

Since college enrollment continues to climb, and the economy increasingly puts a premium on post-graduate degrees, this bodes well for Democrats. Conservatives realize this chink in their armor, which explains why their attacks on higher education are so ardent. David Horowitz's latest anti-university gimmick is Students for Academic Freedom, a Web site where disgruntled conservative undergrads can post complaints, like this one, about unfair treatment from liberal faculty:

> On the last [paper], I wrote about how family values in the books weve [*sic*] read aren't good. I know the paper was pretty much great [*sic*] because I spell checked it and proofred [*sic*] it twice. I got an [*sic*] D- just because the professor hates families and thinks its [*sic*] okay to be gay.

Absurd as this is, Horowitz remains a serious threat. Currently eight different state legislatures are considering the Horowitz-authored "Academic Bill of Rights," which, unsurprisingly, would revoke academic freedom by making the government enforce some ill-defined "diversity." (Critics have pointed out that, as the bill currently reads, it could become mandatory for the underrepresented political views of, say, al Qaeda to be more widely taught.) There are already numerous conservative influences on contemporary campuses: business schools, well-funded publications, economics departments and major corporations that partner with universities in research. With the attacks of Horowitz and others intensifying, we must defend the independent progressive character of American undergraduate education with every arrow in our quiver.



Let's say, though, that our hypothetical youngster doesn't go to college, and instead enters the workforce. If her job is unionized, she will immediately be exposed to progressive ideas about fairness and workplace democracy, but the odds are overwhelmingly against her holding a union job. Over the last 30 years, unionization has fallen from more than 35 percent to less than 12 percent of the workforce due to, among other things, a sustained attack by Republicans on the right to organize. From the instant the National Labor Relations Act passed in 1935, the business class has recognized that unions are the most direct means by which working-class voters are brought into the left. Being in a union has an even more dramatic effect on voting behavior than college. Kerry won two-thirds of union members, and among working-class white voters, a group Kerry lost by 24 points, he won a majority of those in a union.

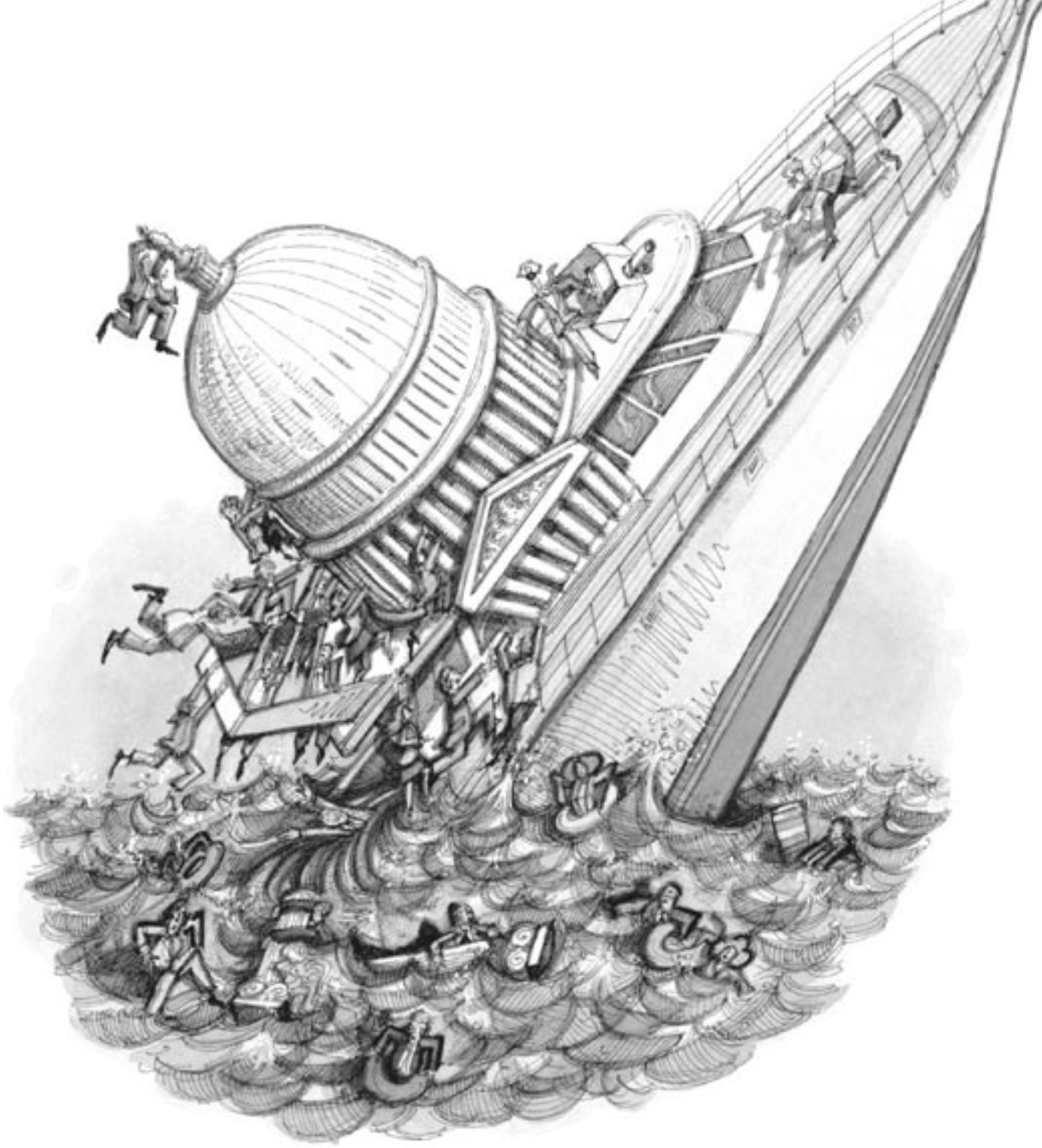
In fact, when you survey the trend lines in the Democratic coalition, you see an odd but altogether predictable trend. College-educated voters are increasingly moving to the left while working class voters are moving to the right. A host of ideas have been put forward to explain this, but the erosion of labor unions and the progressive character of the academy accounts for much of it.

Outside of school, work and friends, the only other real entry point for our hypothetical subject is the Internet and blogosphere. And while these are invaluable resources for people who have no other access to progressive ideas, they don't ring your doorbell or leaflet your local supermarket. High-profile groups such as NARAL Pro-Choice America, the Sierra Club and People for the American Way don't help much either. Though they fight tooth and nail for progressive causes, they are essentially self-contained, devoting little energy toward recruiting non-progressives. Organizations like MoveOn and Democracy For America have revived grassroots, meeting-based membership organizations, but they serve chiefly as a means of coordinating *existing* progressives rather than pulling new people into the fold. How would moderates, conservatives or those with little in the way of fixed politics ever find themselves interfacing with MoveOn other than a TV ad?

Growing the flock

Andy Stern, the controversial head of the nation's fastest-growing union, Service Employees International Union, likes to say that he's a "radical about growth." He's recently made waves in the labor movement by pushing for radical restructuring of the AFL-CIO, with an eye toward focusing the movement's efforts on organizing new workers and bringing millions more under labor's tent. He points *Continued on page 28*

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WAKE UP!

Washington's alarming foreign policy.

BY CHALMERS JOHNSON

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The Rubicon is a small stream in northern Italy just south of the city of Ravenna. During the prime of the Roman Republic, roughly the last two centuries B.C., it served as a northern boundary protecting the heartland of Italy and the city of Rome from its own imperial armies. An ancient Roman law made it treason for any general to cross the Rubicon and enter Italy proper with a standing army. In 49 B.C., Julius Caesar, Rome's most brilliant and successful general, stopped with his army at the Rubicon, contemplated what he was about to do, and then plunged south. The Republic exploded in civil war, Caesar became dictator and then in 44 B.C. was assassinated in the Roman Senate by politicians who saw themselves as ridding the Republic of a tyrant. However, Caesar's death generated even more civil war, which ended only in 27 B.C. when his grand nephew, Octavian, took the title Augustus Caesar, abolished the Republic and established a military dictatorship with himself as "emperor" for life. Thus ended the great Roman experiment with democracy. Ever since, the phrase "to cross the Rubicon" has been a metaphor for starting on a course of action from which there is no turning back. It refers to the taking of an irrevocable step.

I believe that on November 2, 2004, the United States crossed its own Rubicon. Until last year's presidential election, ordinary citizens could claim that our foreign policy, including the invasion of Iraq, was George Bush's doing and that we had not voted for him. In 2000, Bush lost the popular vote and was appointed president by the Supreme Court. In 2004, he garnered 3.5 million more votes than John Kerry. The result is that Bush's war changed into America's war and his conduct of international relations became our own.

This is important because it raises the question of whether restoring sanity and prudence to American foreign policy is still possible. During the Watergate scandal of the early '70s, the president's chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, once reproved White House counsel John Dean for speaking too frankly to Congress about the felonies President Nixon had ordered. "John," he said, "once the toothpaste is out of the tube, it's very hard to get it back in." This homely warning by a former advertising executive who was to spend 18 months in prison for his own role in Watergate fairly accurately describes the situation of the United States after the reelection of George W. Bush.

James Weinstein, the founding editor of *In These Times,* recently posed for me the question "How should U.S. foreign policy be changed so that the United States can play a more positive role on the world stage?" For me, this raises at least three different problems that are interrelated. The first must be solved before we can address the second, and the second has to be corrected before it even makes sense to take up the third.

Sinking the ship of state

First, the United States faces the imminent danger of bankruptcy, which, if it occurs, will render all further discussion of foreign policy moot. Within the next few months, the mother of all financial crises could ruin us and turn us into a North American version of Argentina, once the richest country in South America. To avoid this we must bring our massive trade and fiscal deficits under control and signal to the rest of the world that we understand elementary public finance and are not suicidally indifferent to our mounting debts.

The United States faces the imminent danger of bankruptcy, which, if it occurs, will render all further discussion of foreign policy moot.

Second, our appalling international citizenship must be addressed. We routinely flout well-established norms upon which the reciprocity of other nations in their relations with us depends. This is a matter not so much of reforming our policies as of reforming attitudes. If we ignore this, changes in our actual foreign policies will not even be noticed by other nations of the world. I have in mind things like the Army's and the CIA's secret abduction and torture of people; the trigger-happy conduct of our poorly trained and poorly led troops in places like Iraq and Afghanistan; and our ideological bullying of other cultures because of our obsession with abortion and our contempt for international law (particularly the International Criminal Court) as illustrated by Bush's nomination of John R. "Bonkers" Bolton to be U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

Third, if we can overcome our imminent financial crisis and our penchant for boorish behavior abroad, we might then be able to reform our foreign policies. Among the issues here are the slow-moving evolutionary changes in the global balance of power that demand new approaches. The most important evidence that our life as the "sole" superpower is going to be exceedingly short is the fact that our monopoly of massive military power is being upstaged by other forms of influence. Chief among these is China's extraordinary growth and our need to adjust to it.

Let me discuss each of these three problems in greater depth.

In 2004, the United States imported a record $617.7 billion more than it exported, a 24.4 percent increase over 2003. The annual deficit with China was $162 billion, the largest trade imbalance ever recorded by the United States with a single country. Equally important, as of March 9, 2005, the public debt of the United States was just over $7.7 trillion and climbing, making us easily the world's largest net debtor nation. Refusing to pay for its profligate consumption patterns and military expenditures through taxes on its own citizens, the United States is financing these outlays by going into debt to Japan, China, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong and India. This situation has become increasingly unstable, as the United States requires capital imports of at least $2 billion *per day* to pay for its governmental expenditures. Any decision by Asian central banks to move significant parts of their foreign exchange reserves out of the dollar and into the euro or other currencies in order to protect themselves from dollar depreciation will likely produce a meltdown of the American economy. On February 21, 2005, the Korean central bank, which has some $200 billion in reserves, quietly announced that it intended to "diversify the currencies in which it invests." The dollar fell sharply and the U.S. stock market (although subsequently recovering) recorded its largest one-day fall in almost two years. This small incident is evidence of the knife-edge on which we are poised.

Japan possesses the world's largest foreign exchange reserves, which at the end of January 2005 stood at around $841 billion. But China also sits on a $609.9 billion pile of U.S. cash, earned from its trade surpluses with us. Meanwhile, the American

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government insults China in every way it can, particularly over the status of China's breakaway province, the island of Taiwan. The distinguished economic analyst William Greider recently noted, "Any profligate debtor who insults his banker is unwise, to put it mildly. … American leadership has … become increasingly delusional—I mean that literally—and blind to the adverse balance of power accumulating against it."

These deficits and dependencies represent unusual economic statistics for a country with imperial pretensions. In the 19th century, the British Empire ran huge current account surpluses, which allowed it to ignore the economic consequences of disastrous imperialist ventures like the Boer War. On the eve of the First World War, Britain had a *surplus* amounting to 7 percent of its GDP. America's current account *deficit* is close to 6 percent of our GDP.

In order to regain any foreign confidence in the sanity of our government and the soundness of our policies, we need, at once, to reverse President George W. Bush's tax cuts, including those on capital gains and estates (the rich are so well off they'll hardly notice it), radically reduce our military expenditures, and stop subsidizing agribusinesses and the military-industrial complex. Only a few years ago the United States enjoyed substantial federal surpluses and was making inroads into its public debt. If we can regain fiscal solvency, the savers of Asia will probably continue to finance our indebtedness. If we do not, we risk a fear-driven flight from the dollar by all our financiers, collapse of our stock exchange and global recession for a couple of years—from which the rest of the world will ultimately emerge. But by then we who no longer produce much of anything valuable will have become a banana republic. Debate over our foreign policy will become irrelevant. We will have become dependent on the kindness of strangers.

Ugly Americans

Meanwhile, the bad manners of Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and their band of neoconservative fanatics from the American Enterprise Institute dominate the conduct of American foreign policy. It is simply unacceptable that after the Abu Ghraib torture scandal Congress has so far failed to launch an investigation into those in the executive branch who condoned it. It is equally unacceptable that the president's chief apologist for the official but secret use of torture is now the attorney general, that Defense Secretary Rumsfeld did not resign, and that the seventh investigation of the military by the military (this time headed by Vice Admiral Albert Church III) again whitewashed all officers and blamed only a few unlucky enlisted personnel on the night shift in one cellblock of Abu Ghraib prison. Andrew Bacevich, a West Point graduate and a veteran of 23 years of service as an army officer, says in his book *The New American Militarism* of these dishonorable incidents: "The Abu Ghraib debacle showed American soldiers not as liberators but as tormentors, not as professionals but as sadists getting cheap thrills." Until this is corrected, a president and secretary of state bloviating about freedom and democracy is received by the rest of the world as mere window-dressing.

> Until the United States re-adopts the norms of civilized discourse, it can expect other nations to do everything in their power to isolate and disengage from us.

Foreign policy analysts devote considerable attention to the concept of "credibility"—whether or not a nation is trustworthy. There are several ways to lose one's credibility. One is to politicize intelligence, as Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney did in preparing for their preventive war against Iraq. Today, only a fool would take at face value something said by the CIA or our other secret intelligence services. China has already informed us that it does not believe our intelligence on North Korea, and our European allies have said the same thing about our apocalyptic estimates on Iran.

Similarly, our bloated military establishment routinely makes pronouncements that are untrue. The scene of a bevy of generals and admirals—replete with campaign ribbons marching up and over their left shoulders—baldly lying to congressional committees is familiar to any viewer of our network newscasts.

For example, on February 3, 1998, Marine pilots were goofing off in a military jet and cut the cables of a ski lift in northern Italy, plunging 20 individuals to their deaths. The Marine Corps did everything in its power to avoid responsibility for the disaster, then brought the pilots back to the States for court-martial, dismissed the case as an accident and exonerated the pilots. The Italians haven't forgotten either the incident or how the United States treated an ally. On March 4, 2005, American soldiers opened fire on a civilian car en route to Baghdad airport, killing a high-ranking Italian intelligence officer and wounding the journalist Giuliana Sgrena, who had just been released by kidnappers. The U.S. military immediately started its cover-up, claiming that the car was speeding, that the soldiers had warned it with lights and warning shots and that the Italians had given no prior notice of the trip. Sgrena has contradicted everything our military said. The White House has called it a "horrific accident," but whatever the explanation, we have once again made one of our closest European allies look like dupes for cooperating with us.

In its arrogance and overconfidence, the Bush administration has managed to convince the rest of the world that our government is incompetent. The administration has not only tried to undercut treaties it finds inconvenient but refuses to engage in normal diplomacy with its allies to make such treaties more acceptable. Thus, administration representatives simply walked away from the 1997 Kyoto Protocol on global warming that tried to rein in carbon dioxide emissions, claiming that the economic costs were too high. (The United States generates far more such emissions than any other country.) All of the United States' democratic allies continued to work on the treaty despite our boycott. On July 23, 2001, in Bonn, Germany, a compromise was reached on the severity of the cuts in emissions advanced industrial nations would have to make and on the penalties to be imposed if they do not, resulting in a legally binding treaty so far endorsed by more than 180 nations. The modified Kyoto Protocol is hardly perfect, but it is a start toward the reduction of greenhouse gases.

Similarly, the United States and Israel walked out of the United Nations conference on racism held in Durban, South Africa, in August and September 2001. The nations that stayed on eventually voted down Syrian demands that language accusing Israel of racism be included. The conference's final statement also produced an apology for slavery as a "crime against humanity" but did so

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without making slaveholding nations liable for reparations. Given the history of slavery in the United States and the degree to which the final document was adjusted to accommodate American concerns, our walkout seemed to be yet another display of imperial arrogance—a bald-faced message that "we" do not need "you" to run this world.

Until the United States readopts the norms of civilized discourse among nations, it can expect other nations—quietly and privately—to do everything in their power to isolate and disengage from us.

Future reforms

If through some miracle we were able to restore fiscal rationality, honesty and diplomacy to their rightful places in our government, then we could turn to reforming our foreign policies. First and foremost, we should get out of Iraq and demand that Congress never again fail to honor article 1, section 8, clause 11 of the Constitution giving it the exclusive power to go to war. After that, I believe the critical areas in need of change are our policies toward Israel, imported oil, China and the proliferation of nuclear weapons, although the environment and relations with Latin America may be equally important.

Perhaps the most catastrophic error of the Bush administration was to abandon the policies of all previous American administrations to seek an equitable peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Bush instead joined Ariel Sharon in his expropriation and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians. As a result, the United States has lost all credibility, influence and trust in the Islamic world. In July 2004, Zogby International Surveys polled 3,300 Arabs in Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. When asked whether respondents had a "favorable" or "unfavorable" opinion of the United States, the "unfavorables" ranged from 69 to 98 percent. In the year 2000 there were 1.3 billion Muslims worldwide, some 22 percent of the global population; through our policies we have turned most of them against the United States. We should resume at once the role of honest broker between the Israelis and Palestinians that former President Clinton pioneered.

The United States imports about 3.8 billion barrels of oil a year, or about 10.6 million barrels a day. These imports are at the highest levels ever recorded and come increasingly from Persian Gulf countries. A cut-off of Saudi Arabia's ability or willingness to sell its oil to us would, at the present time, constitute an economic catastrophe. By using currently available automotive technologies as well as those being incorporated today in new Toyota and Honda automobiles, we could end our entire dependency on Persian Gulf oil. We should do that before we are forced to do so.



Freed Italian hostage Giuliana Sgrena has contradicted every detail of the Pentagon's account of her shooting.

FRANCO ORIGLIA / GETTY IMAGES

China's gross domestic product in 2004 grew at a rate of 9.5 percent, easily the fastest among big countries. It is today the world's sixth largest economy with a GDP of $1.4 trillion. It has also become the trading partner of choice for the developing world, absorbing huge amounts of food, raw materials, machinery and computers. Can the United States adjust peacefully to the reemergence of China—the world's oldest, continuously extant civilization—this time as a modern superpower? Or is China's ascendancy to be marked by yet another world war like those of the last century? That is what is at stake. A rich, capitalist China is not a threat to the United States and cooperation with it is our best guarantee of military security in the Pacific.

Nothing is more threatening to our nation than the spread of nuclear weapons. We developed a good policy with the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which with its 188 adherents is the most widely supported arms control agreement ever enacted. Only India, Israel and Pakistan remained outside its terms until January 10, 2003, when North Korea withdrew. Under the treaty, the five nuclear-weapons states (the United States, Russia, China, France and the United Kingdom) agree to undertake nuclear disarmament, while the non-nuclear-weapons states agree not to develop or acquire such weapons. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is authorized to inspect the non-nuclear-weapons states to ensure compliance. The Bush administration has virtually ruined this international agreement by attempting to denigrate the IAEA, by tolerating nuclear weapons in India, Israel, and Pakistan while fomenting wars against Iraq, Iran and North Korea, and by planning to develop new forms of nuclear weapons. Our policy should be to return at once to this established system of controls.

Finally, the most important change we could make in American policy would be to dismantle our imperial presidency and restore a balance among the executive, legislative and judicial branches of our government. The massive and secret powers of the Department of Defense and the CIA have subverted the republican structure of our democracy and left us exposed to the real danger of a military takeover. Reviving our constitutional system would do more than anything else to protect our peace and security. ■

CHALMERS JOHNSON *is the author of the* Blowback Trilogy. *The first two books of which,* Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire, *and* The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic—*are now available in paperback. The third volume is being written.*

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Culture

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BY PHYLLIS ECKHAUS

Fever Dreams

Call it the curse of class unconsciousness. Against all evidence to the contrary, most Americans imagine they could and should be rich, that any day now their ship will dock in the port of great fortune.

And it has always been thus. Writing in the mid-1840s, Alexis de Tocqueville marveled at the loony "courage" of Americans, who repeatedly gambled their all on financial gain, "almost insensible to loss" and instantly prompted to fresh exertions.

Born Losers, Scott A. Sandage's splendid history of the "misfits of capitalism" explores how 19th century America dealt with its own culture of irrational exuberance by locating the reasons for failure "in the man," as Ralph Waldo Emerson asserted, rather than in the wild careening of a winner-take-all, *laissez-faire* economy.

This despite ubiquitous evidence of rack and ruin. Every couple of decades brought a new panic, five in one century. "The land stinks of suicide," Emerson confided to his journal during the Panic of 1837, expressing relief that, having given up the ministry, he would not have the hopeless task of consoling the broke and broken multitudes. Hard cash was so scarce that people minted their own copper "hard times tokens." International opinion condemned the young Yankee nation, from the president on down, as "a fraudulent bankrupt."

In "Life Without Principle," Henry David Thoreau's sardonically-titled essay, Emerson's refractory friend described how contemporary mores pushed people into deluded pursuit of profit: "If a man walk in the woods for love of them half of each day, he is in danger of being regarded as a loafer; but if he spends his whole day as a speculator, shearing off those woods and making the earth bald before her time, he is esteemed an industrious and enterprising citizen." Still, when Thoreau died in 1862, Emerson eulogized him as a failure, albeit beloved: "He seemed born for greatness ... and I cannot help counting it a fault in him that he had no ambition." Far from being a captain of industry, Thoreau

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had sought merely to become "captain of a huckleberry-party."

Like present-day neocons, Jacksonian pundits envisioned every white man a free agent, the engineer of his own financial fate. Jurist Lemuel Shaw, the father of contract law, claimed that nobody failed who ought not to fail. Shaw's son-in-law Herman Melville parodied this faith in free agency in *Bartleby the Scrivener*: When Bartleby, a lowly law clerk, credulously asserts independence, repeatedly declining assignments with a polite "I would prefer not to," the office is thrown into chaos and it's clear that poor Bartleby is both crazed and doomed.

Hucksters reigned supreme within this realm of free enterprise. Showman and con artist P.T. Barnum, the Donald Trump of his day, rebounded from bankruptcy to lecture on "The Art of Money-Getting, or Success in Life." Success demonstrated inherent superiority just as failure exposed infirmity. Preaching

Born Losers
By Scott A. Sandage
Harvard University Press
362 pages, $35

American Mania
By Peter C. Whybrow
Norton
338 pages, $24.95

the "Gospel of Wealth," Andrew Carnegie praised unbridled competition as "best for the race, because it ensures the survival of the fittest."

Character was newly conflated with creditworthiness. The Mercantile Agency, the direct ancestor of Dun & Bradstreet, operated a vast secret surveillance network that sought to report on everyone in business, tracking entrepreneurs as they traversed the country in search of fresh starts and new opportunities. And as business increasingly involved commerce among strangers, 19th century Americans eagerly adopted scientific strategies to fix the identity and character of the unknown other. The new technologies of daguerreotypy and phrenology promised that character could be immediately captured and decoded through photos revealing the shape of one's head.

Today, we too have our false prophets of junk science. In *American Mania*, psychiatrist Peter C. Whybrow, director of UCLA's Neuropsychiatric Institute, professes to have discovered a biological basis for the excesses of U.S. capitalism. Whybrow says that America is a country of migrants, that migrants are genetically predisposed to take risks, and that the high produced by deal-making creates addictive behavior and mania. Mutant genes, or alleles, dictate our body chemistry turning us all into "stress junkies" and suckers for get-rich-quick schemes. Collectively, we're a nation of easily hijacked dopamine reward receptors, he says. The dopamine makes us do it.

One need not dismiss genetics to recognize Whybrow's thesis as elaborate hokum. His footnotes tacitly acknowledge that his "science" extrapolates from small, speculative and inconsistent studies. There's no readily replicable link between his beloved D4 dopamine receptors and impulsivity, let alone the complex behaviors of ordinary workaholics, Internet investors or the Kenneth Lays and Sam Waltons of the world. And common sense contradicts his bizarre biology-based brand of American exceptionalism, his claim that we are uniquely bred for invention and enterprise. If migration thus explained national character, Canadians would be reckless adventurers.

Yet the good doctor's book has met with significant acclaim from a new age semi-progressive crowd, who welcome his prescription for a more touchy-feely kind of capitalism, one moderated by the knowledge that too much deal-making might make you sick. Whybrow presents us with the saga of Tom, who spent the '80s as a "turnaround artist" employed by big banks to fix the supposedly ailing companies whose takeovers they financed. Tom had led a 24/7 adrenalin-fed existence, estranged from family and addicted to deals that gave him the same rush as sex. Whybrow bemoans poor Tom's past unhealthy condition, gracefully sidestepping any concern for the multitudes he must have fired.

Instead, he celebrates the new and improved Tom, who now hawks rehabilitation centers for stressed-out executives. Whybrow quotes with approval Tom's sales shtick, characterizing the seductive power of America's *laissez-faire* mass markets as "the greatest pleasure-generating machine the world [has] ever seen," though unfortunately one with "no published instructions for optimum use." Tom's mission: To protect frazzled high-power execs from burnout by teaching them "how to play the casino without getting hooked." Proudly, Tom promotes an in-the-moment philosophy of "mindfulness"—allegedly rehabilitated, he's now an entrepreneur who turns his cell phone off at night.

Alas, the nostrums of *American Mania* serve to obscure real ills. Whybrow implicitly conflates everyone who's overworked and out-of-touch with the movers-and-shakers of corporate America, presenting us all as hapless victims of our genes, flattering those at the bottom while absolving those on top of moral responsibility for their actions.

There is indeed an "American mania" and it is a deluded conviction of individual agency, oblivious to the constraints of class and structural inequality. Sandage's thoughtful history places our disorder in context while Whybrow's insidiously bad book feeds the fever. ■

PHYLLIS ECKHAUS *is a writer in New York.*

ART SPACE



An' When Yer Smashin' Th' State, Kids, by Skip Williamson, 1971, from "Made in L.A.—The Posters of Peace Press." Peace Press, the Los Angeles printshop founded in 1967 by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Draft Resistance, gave a printed voice to dissent in Southern California for two decades. The exhibit, curated by the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, is at the Los Angeles Valley College Art Gallery through May 5.

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Forget the music: The shaved, slobbering blues-punk is merely a means to an end.

BY JAMES PARKER

End of an Era

No one rolls in their own excrement for nothing. GG Allin, or Jesus Christ Allin, as he was christened—his little brother Merle called him Je-Je—surely had a good reason for becoming the most degraded performer in the history of rock 'n' roll. But what was it? Was it Culture he opposed? Or Life itself? Or was it the Normal, that shuffling colossus? And did the fact that he was raised in an unheated two-room cabin in Northumberland, New Hampshire, by a man who dug graves in the cellar, have anything to do with it?

The new DVD, *GG Allin: Savage South—Best of 1992 Tour*, gives us no answers. Here is GG naked, toothless, on the last tour of his life (he would die of an overdose in 1993) with his band the Murder Junkies, giving everyone hell. The tattoos on his body—"Life Sucks," "Vomitose," cartoon gravestones—look like the work of a talented but vengeful six-year old.

As for the music—forget the music. The shaved, slobbering blues-punk is merely a means to an end. The first song ("I Live To Be Hated") has barely begun before GG starts whacking the mike testily against his bald, dented skull—within five minutes he is wearing his trademark inverted crown of blood. And soon enough the shit literally starts to fly: He squats, rolls in it, then scoops it up and flings it at the crowd with lavish painterly gestures. Is this what the French call "nostalgie de la boue"—a reveling in the organic? *Savage South* records the memorable image of a man behind a speaker—some bouncer or stagehand—stolidly *putting on a raincoat* while the Murder Junkies are tuning up. When GG starts to eat the Bible—and a night in which he didn't get himself arrested, give someone a ketchup enema or eat a few pages of the Bible was a slow night for GG—we are reassured: This is not insanity, this is only blasphemy.

GG (and how appropriate the baby name feels, for this raging toddler of a man) represented the dead-end and logical terminus of the performance aesthetic pioneered by Iggy Pop in the '70s. Destruction, immolation, blood. And shit, which was GG's own contribution. This month's other notable new DVD, *Iggy Pop—Live in San Fran 1981* captures the Ig at a strange moment in his career. The Stooges are a memory, and his comeback on the arm of David Bowie is fading too. Still with tremendous bad-boy cachet, but no longer interested in tearing himself to pieces, he is on the road promoting the most flimsily hedonistic of his albums, "Party."

Unbelievably, it sounds pretty good. Brainless numbers like "Bang Bang" and "Rock 'n' Roll Party," and even the tottering "I'm a Conservative" ("I passed out on many floors/ I don't do that anymore"), when played by a crack band that includes ex-Blondie drummer Clem Burke and future Bowie guitarist Carlos Alomar, achieve a kind of dark clubland rush, with Iggy's lizard baritone loitering and glittering beneath.

This is 1981. The bassist is wearing a Star Trek-style jumpsuit and an earring that hangs from his ear like a string of golden drool; one of the guitarists has a skinny tie. Iggy himself is tastefully arrayed in leather jacket, miniskirt, garters, nylons and heels; dipping and thrusting, hunching and high-kicking, he seems to be in peak condition. When he comes out for the encore, still in his lady-gear but now wearing a nice oxford shirt, he looks like someone's rather racy personal assistant.

A sharper contrast with the beer-gutted and unbeautiful GG could not be imagined. In direct homage to Iggy, GG would occasionally shake it like a stripper, arms raised, hips twitching, but the effect was a savage parody, a sort of sexual evacuation. No one was admiring GG—he was not bathed like Iggy in the frankly desirous gazes of young men and women. GG's audience on *Savage South* wants to beat him up (and they do—about 10 of them, at the end of a set in Texas). Put GG's sullen, much-abused flesh next to the prowess of Iggy, those stallion legs of his, the thoroughbred musculature twanging in its black hose, and you get a sense of why one man survived and the other didn't. ■

JAMES PARKER *lives in Boston and writes frequently for* Arthur *magazine.*

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BY MARK ENGLER

Failures of a 'Hit Man'

From David Horowitz to David Brock, partisan turncoats who abandon their youthful convictions often receive generous attention from their newfound cohort. Perhaps this explains the recent embrace of

John Perkins, a former corporate consultant and author of *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*.

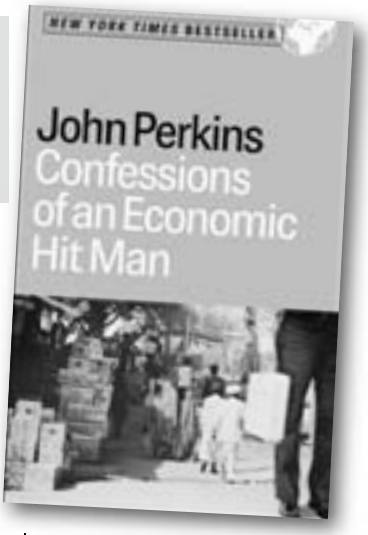
Remarkably, his book, which uses an insider's perspective to construct a forthright critique of neoliberal globalization and U.S. foreign policy, has climbed as high as number nine on the *New York Times* bestseller list. In recent months, Perkins has joined Amy Goodman for an extended radio interview and has lectured attentive audiences at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre.

Regrettably, *Confessions* is not a good book, and readers have reason to believe that Perkins has yet to earn the place of honor granted him by many concerned globalists.

True, Perkins has written an engaging account of the "highly paid professionals who cheat countries around the globe out of trillions of dollars. They funnel money from the World Bank…and other foreign 'aid' organizations into the coffers of huge corporations and the pockets of a few wealthy families who control the planet's natural resources."

These professionals are the titular economic hit men. And Perkins tells us that, for the decade of the '70s, he was one of them, rising to the rank of "Chief Economist" at the powerful, if secretive, contracting firm of Chas T. Main.

Confessions of an Economic Hit Man
By John Perkins
Berrett-Koehler
250 pages, $24.95



Perkins claims that after being recruited by the National Security Agency (NSA), he was sent to the private sector. There, he knowingly worked to convince poor countries to take on loans that they could never repay, so that firms like Main, Halliburton and Bechtel could enjoy lucrative construction contracts and the U.S. government could leverage its power over the indebted nations. "My publisher asked whether we actually referred to ourselves as economic hit men," Perkins writes. "I assured him that we did, although usually only by the initials," EHMs.

That many Americans are learning of the EHMs' nefarious acts through Perkins' book is undoubtedly a good thing. But the actual content of Perkins' admissions proves distressingly thin. It turns out that, in the 25 years since he retired, EHMs have ceased to exist as such. By the end of his tenure, the ruling "corporatocracy" had "gotten better or more pernicious." Describing the people he recruited, Perkins writes, "There had been no NSA polygraphs in their lives. No one had spelled it out for them, what they were expected to do to carry on the mission of global empire." Today's corporate agents, as we suspected long before Perkins, simply operate in pursuit of profit and power, with the belief that economic growth will yield salvation. The explicit exercise of bad faith foreign policy embodied by the now-defunct EHM is no longer needed.

In Porto Alegre, Walden Bello placed *Confessions* in the tradition of the Pentagon Papers and of ex-agent Philip Agee's anti-CIA memoir. Similarly, in his dust jacket quotation, David Korten writes that Perkins "names names and connects the dots." But that is precisely what Perkins doesn't do. Unlike Agee's extensive listing of CIA operatives, Perkins outs no one. Rather than bringing forth his own evidence of specific offenses, he relies on already published accounts to back his revelations: He uses a *Vanity Fair* story to discuss the Bushes' relationship with the Saudi royal family, referring to his own Saudi contact only as "Prince W."

Then there are his New Age leanings. Toward the end of the book, Perkins writes about his current nonprofit work with indigenous people in places like Ecuador. In a bizarre turn, he delves into a type of essentialism that, thankfully, has been long banished from university anthropology departments. He recounts "The Prophecy of the Condor and the Eagle," predicting a time in which "the condor people of the Amazon," with their "intuitive and mystical" sensibilities, will learn to live in peace with the "rational and material" Eagle.

The fate of the "Third Millennium" aside, Perkins' work is incomplete—we should demand something more than his current *Confessions*. If other ex-EHMs come forward as a result of his book to uncover the specific deals and deal-makers that have shaped the modern age of globalization, it would be an inspiring development.

But for now, we have only Perkins. He has written the spy-thriller version of his past life—designed to be accessible, if not to offer much fat on the bone. Now that he has our attention, let's have the meat. ■

MARK ENGLER, *a writer based in New York City, is a commentator for Foreign Policy in Focus.*

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From Red to Blue

Continued from page 19

out that while unions poured unprecedented resources into the 2004 presidential campaign and did an impressive job of getting their members to the polls to vote for John Kerry, there simply weren't enough union members to swing the election.

The same could be said of progressives in general: We can mobilize all we want, but if we are mobilizing a shrinking group of people, it's worth little.

In order to grow, progressives need to systematically expand the universe of access points to the progressive worldview and actively recruit people into the fold. There are three main ways this can be achieved: the development of a vibrant progressive mass media, a revived labor movement, and the organizing of large-scale grassroots social movements in regions and among constituencies that are currently estranged from progressivism. Many astute commentators have written extensively about the first two, so it seems wise to focus here on why the third part of this strategy is important, and what it might entail.

Once upon a time, organizing meant more than coordinating e-mail petitions or hosting house parties to raise money and awareness. It meant something much closer to what we now think of as missionary work. A union would send an organizer into, say, a small mining town in Pennsylvania. He would reach out to the miners, get to know them and their families, and tell them what a union was and how it could help them. He would try to convince them to risk their livelihoods by banding together and demanding a safer workplace and better wages. This was difficult, often bloody work. But when it worked—and often it didn't—it effected a transformation of the miners who joined the union. They now had a new identity. Even if they had joined solely for higher wages or a mine less likely to kill them, after suffering lockouts, harassment and possibly beatings, they would have an entirely new perspective on bosses and power. They would be more progressive.

This is what social movements at their best do. They pull back the curtain on power and expose its workings. They politicize those without political engagements by transforming personal grievances in the workplace, at home and in society into political issues. Before the labor movement, a dangerous workplace, low wages and arduously long workdays were just crappy things about a person's life. Before feminism, stifling your personal ambitions in favor of doting on your husband was just a drawback to being a woman.

And here's one point of access that conservative policies are inadvertently expanding: the moments of personal crisis—unmanageable debt, hospitalization without health insurance, lack of mental health services, sudden unemployment—that reveal to Americans that the right's ideology of "personal responsibility" masks the destruction of a social safety net for middle- and lower-income workers.

Movements draw people into something larger than themselves and show them who their friends and enemies are. A union organizer once told me, "I do this work for the three or four times a year when you look in a worker's eyes and you see she realizes what she's up against."

Through opposition and conflict, movements introduce their participants to a broader political ethos, one that may have a host of specific ideological commitments that are initially foreign. In *What's the Matter with Kansas?* Thomas Frank highlights how this works on the right. The working-class Kansans he describes who became involved with Operation Rescue because of a strongly held religious belief in the iniquity of abortion didn't start out with a position on the inheritance tax, school vouchers or energy deregulation. But to join the "pro-life" movement is to join the conservative movement as a whole. Quickly members learn who their enemies are—liberal elites, college professors, Hollywood, feminists—and through a sort of ricochet reasoning set their politics on *other* issues in opposition. Unions work in a similar fashion. When you learn that the boss's interests are, in many cases, diametrically opposed to your own, you start listening to what positions the boss takes and then take the opposite.

> Progressives need to systematically expand the universe of access points to the progressive worldview and actively recruit people into the fold.

Taking on creditors

So what would a newly evangelical kind of progressive movement look like in 2005 and beyond?

Here's an idea. One thing that nearly all Americans share is debt. Building a movement around credit reform—through the formation of local "debt clubs" that would be part of a national campaign, for example—would be one way for progressives to reach out to non-believers.

Almost one in seven households have declared bankruptcy. Many middle class families that took out second mortgages during the '90s refi craze are now skating on thin ice. The average American family saw its credit card debt rise 53 percent during the '90s. Credit card companies have dramatically raised late fees—revenue from which increased fourfold between 1996 and 2001—while reducing minimum payments.

The result is that people stay in debt longer and pay more. Using an industry standard 2 percent minimum payment, a $5,000 balance will now take 32 years to pay off, at an interest cost of almost $8,000. In the last decade, more than 14,000 payday lending establishments have sprung up across the country wherever there are working and poor people living paycheck to paycheck (including military bases). Their short-term, high-interest loans, which are easily rolled over, can approach annual rates of 450 percent.

Young people today are beginning their adult lives already buried in debt: The average college student now graduates with $18,900 in student loans, the bulk of it non-subsidized debt at commercial interest rates. The interest costs of these loans are likely to increase as Republicans seek to cut federally subsidized Stafford loans and Pell grants.

We have a moral obligation to do something about this. Fighting against usury and the persecution of debtors has a long religious history as well as a social justice lineage. If there is one value that progressives should stand for, it is the democratization of capitalism, and few things are as inherently undemocratic as a society where large numbers of middle- and working-class people are at the mercy of a small group of unregulated creditors. Building an anti-debt movement would also be an appropriate strategy for these post-industrial times, when consumers are exploited for their purchasing power just as workers are for their cheap labor. As our economy gets riskier by the day, we need policies that miti-

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gate that risk, not exacerbate it.

Organizing around debt makes a lot of political sense. It hits families with children especially hard (a group Kerry lost by a 19 percent margin). It unites a wide swath of the electorate—urban, rural, black, Latino, white—and has special resonance in places where Democrats fare worst. The 10 states with the highest bankruptcy rates are all red states—Utah, Tennessee, Nevada, Arkansas, Indiana, Alabama, Arkansas, Ohio, Mississippi and Idaho.

A movement for credit reform also has the potential to drive a wedge between cultural and fiscal conservatives, weakening the coalition of conservative interests while building the progressive "brand" by re-associating progressives with fairness, justice and populism. There's ample precedent. During his famous Cross of Gold speech in 1896, populist presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan, who in many ways forged the 20th century Democratic Party, asked: "Upon which side will the Democratic Party fight—upon the side of 'the idle holders of idle capital,' [i.e., the banks], or upon the side of 'the struggling masses'?"

The moment is also right. The criminally venal bankruptcy bill just passed in the Senate (with the votes of 18 Democratic Senators) caught the attention of the progressive blogosphere, which helped launch an unsuccessful bid to derail it. Ultimately that effort failed because there was no national, grassroots movement made up of debtors. Creating one should be a top progressive priority.

Americans Coming Together (ACT), a massive voter organization group, could, in a future incarnation, select 100 red counties in red states with high bankruptcy rates and pay for two organizers and an office in each. The organizers would use the extensive e-mail lists of groups like MoveOn and Democracy for America to recruit volunteers from among local progressives, and reach out to people in the area who are in serious debt through canvassing, fliers and other means.

They could form these local debt clubs that would offer an opportunity to share experiences and get practical advice about consolidating debt, the best strategies to avoid foreclosures and how to file for bankruptcy. These clubs might next begin to target local predatory lenders or payday lending outfits, demanding that municipalities change zoning laws to stem their growth.

At the same time as organizing and outreach is happening on the ground locally, ACT could begin a national media campaign around a "credit reform" platform that would reregulate the credit industry, empower those filing for bankruptcy, cap annual interest rates and outlaw predatory lending practices. Groups like MoveOn, TrueMajority and progressive blogs could promote the cause and solicit membership dues from all over the country, the proceeds of which would go to support those who were victims of particularly egregious practices. Progressives nationwide could target the purveyors of the worst practices for a boycott.

Success would build on success. As local groups discovered that credit reform is possible, the agenda might expand toward healthcare reform, since so many bankruptcies are caused by healthcare crises, or debt forgiveness for developing countries suffering from similar fates as American debtors.

> What progressives must avoid at all costs is a defeatist tendency to hunker down and commiserate over how embattled we are.

With enough time, hard work and resources, one could imagine the development of a real, broad-based and politically powerful constituency in favor of an economically progressive agenda.

Many community groups, like ACORN, are doing work in this vein. But they don't have the resources of ACT or the Democratic National Committee. And most important, due to their tax status, they are unable to bring their leverage to bear in the electoral arena. The "central challenge for progressive politics," Paul Wellstone wrote in *Conscience of a Liberal*, is "how to build the local victories into a strong national and international presence that can crucially define the quality of life."

In tandem with local organizing, then, the local debt clubs would also need to develop a muscular political program and electoral organization that is independent of, yet operates within, the Democratic Party. Volunteers would be trained as campaign managers and canvassers, and leaders would be groomed for campaigns for local office—alderman, city council, state rep—and campaign on credit reform.

Wellstone's own Senate campaigns fully embodied a successful hybrid of community organizing and electoral politics. As a liberal college professor, he would seem to be the ripest possible target for any number of right-wing smears. Yet he won statewide office in the swing state of Minnesota twice. Much of his success rested on his base of support among poor and working-class rural voters whom he had been organizing for more than a decade prior to his first campaign in 1990.

Clearly, organizing around debt won't by itself revive the Democratic Party. It is just one possible example of the kind of issue that can anchor evangelical grassroots organizing. There are a number of other issues with similar potential—healthcare and a universal living wage both come to mind—and there is no shortage of other avenues to pursue. Progressives must articulate a coherent foreign policy that is non-imperialist, non-militaristic and non-corporatist, but vigilant in its commitment to security and the promotion of democracy and human rights abroad.

The efforts to build a real progressive mass media are also vital, since they provide another possible entry point for those isolated from progressivism. Universities and higher education must be defended from reactionary attempts to enforce state-dictated political orthodoxy. The labor movement must be revived by any means necessary.

What must be avoided at all costs is a tendency to hunker down and commiserate over how embattled we are. We must be outward looking, expansionist and evangelical in our every move.

I recently attended a meeting of a local chapter of Campus Crusade for Christ where the club's president screened a 10-minute video intended to get people excited about evangelizing. It was a blurry digital video featuring college students answering the question: "Would you be interested in a conversation about God if your friend brought it up?" Uniformly, the students in the video said, yeah, sure, why not. The video ended with an exhortation that is as relevant to progressives as it is to young Christians:

"They're willing to listen," it said. "Are you willing to tell?" ■

CHRISTOPHER HAYES *is a contributing editor. His last story for* In These Times *was "The Fight for Our Future," (February 14).*

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Tibetans in Exile

Continued from back page

50 Indian rupees, is pocket change for the hordes of Western tourists. This difference has caused the price of many goods to rise above affordable levels.

Dharamsala today is not the quaint, isolated spiritual center it once was. By the burnt down rubble across from a Buddhist temple, youths push drugs to foreigners and locals in broad daylight. Drunken elderly men prowl the streets at night amongst monks in maroon robes. And the increasingly popular nightclub culture is fueling more trouble. While walking to a local restaurant, our group was caught in the middle of an argument between a restless Nepali teenager and a club owner. The boy was about to hurl a rock at the man, which likely would have precipitated a brawl, had not our monk guides intervened.

Tourism fuels many of these disturbances. For example, there has always been a special Israeli connection with Dharamsala. The city welcomes Israelis with open arms—evident from the many successful Israeli businesses here, and an exchange program between Jewish and Tibetan children. But a new generation of Israelis is visiting Dharamsala—those in their early twenties taking a year off after their obligatory military service. After a few years of army life fighting the Palestinian resistance, hundreds—sometimes thousands—of young Israelis arrive in the spring and summer for rest and relaxation, or, more accurately, sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll.

Syed Nasurullah Mustafa, a Kashmiri shopkeeper, has witnessed the inflow of Israeli youngsters over the last five years. While insisting that he enjoys the older generation of Israeli tourists and has befriended many of them, Mustafa says that those coming straight out of the army are "sometimes crazy" and that they bring their lifestyle of "trance parties and smoking hashish" to the younger generation.

The commercial growth in Dharamsala appears to be too large for the town to handle. Potato chip bags and plastic water bottles litter the half-paved streets and flow through the once pristine streams. Monkeys, who carry dangerous diseases, are attracted to the overflowing trash receptacles. At night, they tear apart the city's few public dumpsters and redistribute the garbage throughout the hillsides. Like much of India, Dharamsala does not have a sanitation system that can keep up with the rate of consumption. The growing use of western products, like disposable diapers, complicates the garbage crisis. Diesel exhaust from the hordes of tourist buses and miniature taxis has forced many locals to protect themselves with surgical masks when strolling through the public bazaars.

Is all lost for Tibetans in exile? Surely, the continuation of traditional social patterns and the strength of educational facilities like the Institute for Buddhist Dialectics speak to the culture's resilence. The Dalai Lama is still respected by many world leaders and much of Tibetan Buddhist cultural practices remain intact.

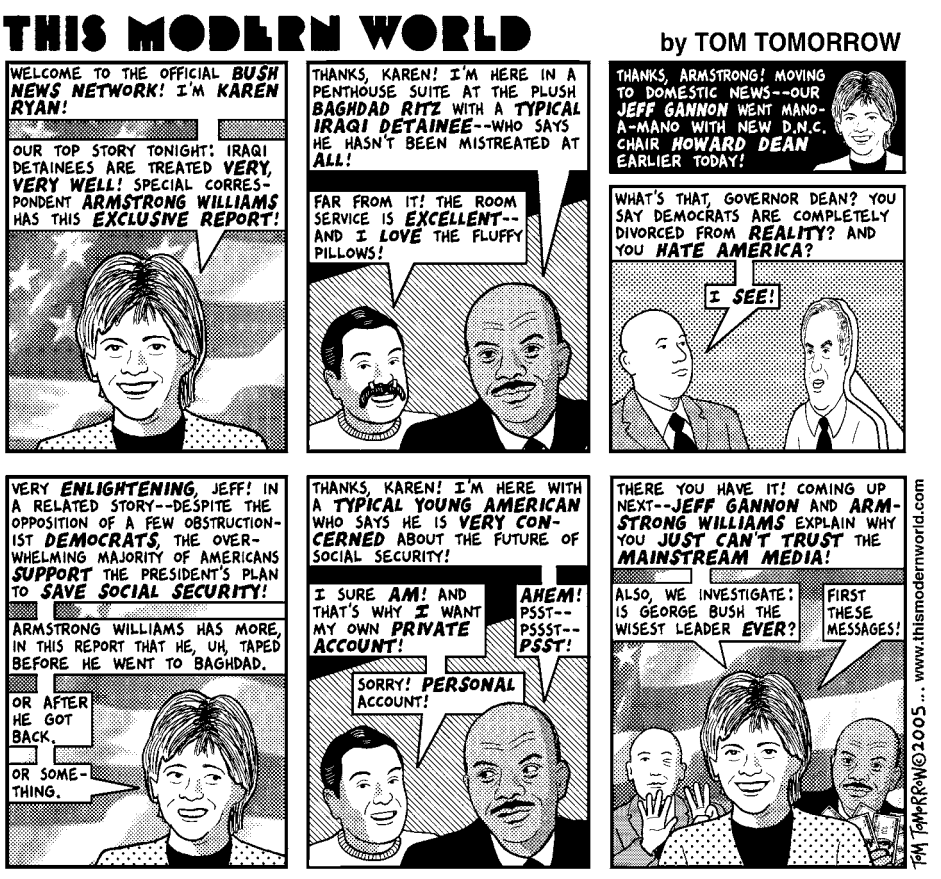
But China's intransigence on the issue of Tibetan autonomy has not waned. In February, five Tibetan monks in Western China were imprisoned for publishing political poetry. And the United States and Europe have been careful not to let political issues, like Tibetan autonomy, get in the way of their economic relationship with the rapidly industrializing trade giant.

However, the Dalai Lama is working with European leaders to put Tibet back on the global human rights agenda at the same time the E.U.'s own relationship with China becomes all the more critical.

On March 10, Siim Kallas, Vice-President of the European Commission, released a statement urging Chinese leaders to begin a direct dialogue with the Dalai Lama. "We will, no doubt, continue to pay the greatest attention to the situation in Tibet," he said, "and to press for conditions which allow the Tibetans to fully exercise their basic political, religious and cultural rights and permit the cultural identity of Tibet to be preserved." ■

> Can a refugee society keep living off the kindness of strangers, especially when the cause for a free Tibet is losing its appeal?

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BY ARI PAUL

Tibetans Face New Uncertainty in Exile



A Tibetan monk looks out over the Kangra Valley during Losar Festivities in Dharamsala.

ARI PAUL

Dharamsala, India—The rain came down harder and those celebrating the final day of Losar, the Tibetan New Year, squeezed in tighter to get under the roof. All were on their feet to sing the Tibetan national anthem. Barley flour was thrown in the air to signify the beginning of the New Year. Monks, laymen and Western spectators brushed the flour off their holiday clothes as they mingled about smiling and welcoming in the New Year.

February in Dharamsala—the seat of the Tibetan government in exile and home to thousands of Tibetan refugees—is usually a joyous month. Not only does it signify the New Year, it's when the Dalai Lama gives public teachings for two weeks. Buddhists from around the world come for both events.

This year, Tibetan Buddhists from Nepal were notably absent during Losar. For the last several years, they have been in the crossfire of the bloody Maoist insurgency; the rebels have said that when they topple the regime Buddhist temples will be converted into grain storage houses. After Nepal's King Gyanendra sacked the elected government in February, no one has been able to leave the country. The one exception was the Dalai Lama's diplomatic mission, which was expelled from Katmandu at the behest of China.

Here in northern India's "Little Lhasa," where the Dalai Lama has made his home since he and thousands of other Tibetans fled Chinese-occupied Tibet in 1959, the culture faces other pressures.

Tibetans in Dharamsala sustain an economy simply by being Tibetan. While they are denied refugee aid from the United Nations thanks to China's permanent veto power on the Security Council, the tourism that the Dalai Lama and the Buddhist community bring to the region make Tibetans one of the wealthiest refugee communities in the world. The Institute of Buddhist Dialects is funded by private donors as well as the Belgian government. The medical college in Dharamsala receives major funding from German donors. And the support of wealthy celebrities like Richard Gere, Adam Yauch of the Beastie Boys, and Philip Glass is a big help, too.

Most buildings in Dharamsala that predate the Tibetans' arrival are made from spare oil barrels held up with bamboo; newer buildings made of bricks stand as testaments to the new wealth. The modernization of Dharamsala stands in sharp contrast to quaint villages in the Kangra valley to the south. According to my translator, Geshe Lobsang, convenience stores, beer bars, Internet cafes, and a Baskin Robbins have all popped up here in the last decade.

This affluence may be fleeting. Can this refugee society keep living off the kindness of strangers when the free Tibet cause is losing its popular appeal? More importantly, as the Indian economy modernizes and the IT industry grows, what place will the Tibetan mercantile class have in the years to come?

The question of a sustainable economy is a problem for the future. For now, the wealth coming into Dharamsala may actually be too much of a good thing. Since the commercial boom started about 10 years ago, the introduction of U.S., British and European currency has greatly skewed the economy. A day's wage for some in Dharamsala, *Continued on page 31*

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